



# I AM COLLECTING RAINBOWS

C. G. VALLES, S. J.



*By the same author*

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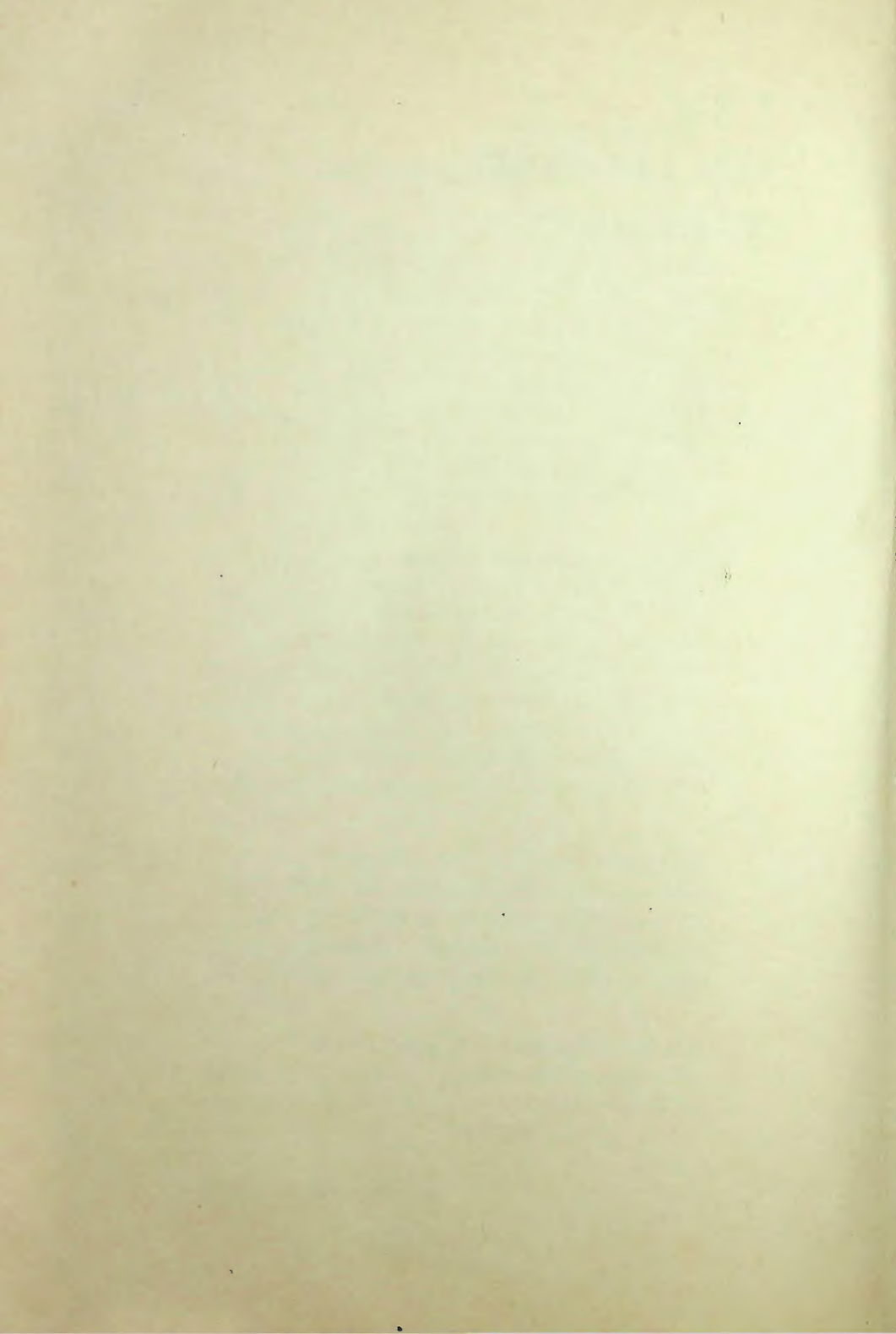
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I AM  
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RAINBOWS

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# I AM COLLECTING RAINBOWS

THE  
MULTIPLE 'I'

A Jesuit's  
Autobiography

Carlos G. Valles, S.J.



1985

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## CHASING THE RAINBOW

I set about writing this book as a study in self-integration. When I finished it I realized I had written my autobiography. The result amused me, but was not unexpected. The only way for me to speak on self-integration was to reflect on the way I'd gone about my own integration in my own life, and so the study of a life question had to become autobiography. Let it stand as such.

The main three personal dichotomies that started me on my search were: (1) I belong to my own family: I am my mother's son and my brother's brother; and at the same time I belong to my religious family: I am a priest, a religious, a Jesuit. (2) I am a Spaniard and I am an Indian. (3) I am a mathematics teacher and a Gujarati writer. Other aspects have added themselves to these main themes without any attempt at comprehensiveness, consistency or connectedness. In a way every book I write is autobiographical, and as I want to write more books yet, I'm not exhausting my thoughts in this one.

Again, as I say somewhere in the text, this study was prompted by my personal reflexion on Ignatius' "Principle and Foundation". Thus the book, for all its multiple aspects, is and remains fundamentally the autobiography of a Jesuit. Readers (even non-Jesuit readers, and perhaps specially non-Jesuit readers) may be interested to know how a Jesuit feels on the inside. Here is a candid answer.

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*Every man  
is born as many men  
and dies as a single one.*

MARTIN HEIDEGGER

## I AM MANY PEOPLE

I begin with a story. A dervish story. An uncouth villager from the countryside travels to the big town in the region for the first time in his life, feels lost among the multitude and variety of the crowds that fill its streets, goes to sleep in the large public hall of a common inn in the midst of scores of others like himself, and, being afraid that on waking up in the morning he may not find himself in such a crowd, he ties a balloon to his right ankle for recognition and goes contentedly to sleep. A practical joker in the hall notices the operation, quietly unties the balloon and ties it to his own ankle. When our villager wakes up in the morning he sees the sign of self-recognition tied to another man's ankle, scratches his head, and muses aloud in existential bewilderment: "If I am not I, then who in heaven's name am I?"

Dervish stories have an edge to them. And I felt the edge of this one cut through me and puncture the many balloons I have tied to my ankle in the course of



my life, challenge the several identities I have assumed in time, awaken me to the many things I am, the different faces I possess, the multiple heritage I bear. Several times in my life I have apparently ceased to be something or someone in the effort to become someone else, only to realize later in life that the effort had been unsuccessful, that I never quite 'ceased' to be what I had once been, and that it is all those 'avatars' together—sought, rejected, forgotten, rediscovered, unconscious, alive, opposed, reconciled—that make up the whole of me as I am today.

At fifteen I was a happy schoolboy, keen in my studies, a voracious reader, addicted to the first place in class, passionate friend in a close group of four intimates, captain of the third-division football team in the school, fond of good food and bright clothes, in love with Mozart and mad about chess. Then next day I was a novice. A black cassock, a close crop, lowered eyes, whispered words, silent walks in the vaulted stone cloisters of Ignatius' own birthplace at Loyola. I was a happy novice too—only I didn't suspect then how much of the schoolboy remained under the novice's black cassock. It has always been there.

For twenty-four years I never left my native Spain. Patriotism was never my strong point, but whatever was there in the language, culture, religion, atmosphere, tastes and values in post-war pre-conciliar Spain went into my system and built up my way of looking at things and evaluating people. Mine was then a self-confident, over-simplified, all-knowing view of the universe and of men in it. Clear-cut, dogmatic, self-righteous. That was the only true view, and I had it in full. And then suddenly I was in India with a lifetime

before me in the centre of another culture older and richer, infinitely complex and radically different from all I'd known before. I learnt the language, read new books, visited holy places, made friends with Hindus. Very slowly and very reluctantly I began to see things differently, to look at persons in a new light, to feel the whole of life in a different way. Now I am spiritually at home in India. Its traditions, attitudes, philosophy and outlook have largely and intimately become my own. And beneath them all my former Spanish self persists and asserts itself unmistakably. I know now that I have East and West within me. And I welcome both.

On a solemn day under a bishop's blessing, with the touch of holy oil in the palms of my hands and the sound of sacred words in my ears, I became a priest. That was the greatest single observable change in my life. From that day on people called me 'father', held me in reverence as representing God among them, and expected me to behave accordingly. I experienced that new reality in me with almost tangible faith, and generously and confidently built on it my way of acting and reacting to people, my way of interpreting and living my own life in practice. I felt myself visibly and deeply affected by the grace of the sacrament, and it was almost reluctantly that I had to admit to myself at occasional intervals that under the holy oils remained much, if not all, of my old self. The schoolboy was still there.

And then I was a college professor, a students' counsellor, a professional speaker, a writer, a columnist. I've had several titles on my visiting card, I've been introduced in different ways, I've been different things to different people. I was happy with each successive

incarnation, and for many years I never experienced, or allowed myself to experience, any conflict between the different roles I assumed. I needed an outside reaction, a spontaneous feedback from a friend to get a little shaken in my self-complacency and to begin to think with some seriousness about who I really was. I had taken myself for granted - an attitude which is very comfortable but which leads to nothing. And I clearly remember today the first confrontation, the first little episode that opened my eyes and made me train my analysis on myself.

I had gone to stay for a year in a university hostel in Gujarat to learn the language, a stranger in every way in the midst of a thousand students. One of them risked the criticism of others by getting closer to me on his own, and in the course of the year became a true friend, my first Hindu friend. He was an Amin by caste and surname, and was quickly nicknamed 'paleface Amin' for his association with me. He taught me Indian table manners, ways of addressing letters, social behaviour, even explained shyly to me the meaning, not to be found in any dictionary, of the choice words of abuse I heard on the campus and innocently asked him about. I came to speak openly to him about my work, my ideas, my life, and I thought I had made it clear to him who I was and what I wanted. That was why his words to me on our last intimate talk disconcerted me and have remained vividly in my memory to this day. He told me: "I've never understood you. We have been a whole year together, still to this day I don't know who you really are. Are you a missionary? Are you a scholar? Are you a philanthropist, a social reformer? Or just a good friend? I don't know. You are a mystery man. No one can understand you."



'A mystery man'. Those were hard words to hear. I knew he had defended me when others attacked my presence in the campus as a threat of proselytism, as a Christian menace; he had taken me to his own home and introduced me warmly to his family; he knew me and appreciated me. And now he called me 'a mystery man'. I resented him for saying that. Was I not candid, simple, transparent? Had I not been plain, trusting, intimate? I had no secrets, no guile, no duplicity. And yet he had said I was a mystery to him. It took me still a long long time in life to realize that I was a mystery to myself too. And then I remembered him. He had been only too right.

Quite a few years later I remembered him again in circumstances that made me smile as I mused on how the question of one's own identity overtakes sooner or later every thinking person whatever his occupation, his character or his personality. 'Paleface Amin' had long left India and settled in America, and I hadn't heard of him for years. Then one day in a function I was attending in Ahmedabad I recognized his father and went up to him. He gave me news of his son in America, his life there, his refusal to come back, his views and way of life so different now from what they were before; and then he added shaking his head: "I don't understand my son any more. He's settled there and has grown used to that type of life. But his position is by no means clear to me. Is he an American? Is he an Indian? I don't know. And I don't think he knows. He says he's happy there, and I hope he is. But I'm afraid he is terribly confused. At least I am. I don't understand him any more."

Every man is a mystery unto himself. And the

richer his life, the deeper the mystery. External circumstances, a change of country, of occupation, of relationship bring home to us the inner contradictions of which we are made, and give us the chance to grow in self-understanding by recognizing, accepting and integrating all that we irreconcilably, paradoxically, irritatingly and blissfully are.

'War in My Blood' is the expressive title of Salvador de Madariaga's best novel. Its hero, Rodrigo Manrique, is the son of a Spanish grandee and a native woman from a priestly family in the Mexico of Hernan Cortes. He is baptized a Catholic and brought up as a Spanish nobleman, but his Mexican blood surges in him, and he secretly returns to the Aztec cult and his priestly calling, and even performs human sacrifices with his own hand. His Spanish ancestry also included Arab and Jewish blood, and when his father apprises him of that fact, he bursts into bewildered anger: "What am I then? Even an Arab? Even a Jew? So many people in my body? So many races in my blood? Aztecs, Spaniards, Goths, Jews and Arabs. And does your honour still expect me to be in my senses and to behave myself? Who is going to rule so many people as your honour has put inside me? Shall I worship God or Allah or Yahweh or Uitzilopochtli? I don't know. I am a crowd."

Saleem Sinai, autobiographical hero in Salman Rushdie's 'Midnight's Children' expresses the same predicament in a different mood and a different language: "Who what am I? My answer: I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected

was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after I've gone which would not have happened if I had not come. Nor am I particularly exceptional in this matter; each 'I', every one of the now-six-hundred-million-plus of us, contains a similar multitude. I repeat for the last time: to understand me you'll have to swallow a world."

Ortega y Gasset summed up his philosophy in a pregnant sentence: "I am I and my circumstance." And the 'circumstance' changes, challenges, enriches, disturbs, opposes, unites. My circumstance embraces my past, present and future, people close to me and people I have forgotten, the moods of a lifetime and the heritage of centuries. I am many things. I am many people. And I want to find out all that I am within myself. I want to know my 'circumstance'.

"Who Am I?" is, in a deeper frame of mind, the title of the only prose work, short pointed dialogue, ever written by the sage of Arunachal in Tiruvannamalai, South India, to me one of the most genuine and most loveable saints of our age. To that single-minded enquiry he reduced the whole spiritual effort of man for enlightenment, self-realization and liberation. His was a metaphysical quest, to be sure, but it was prompted by his experience as a young brahmin who did not identify with his family nor with his teachers, who went through a strange 'death experience' by which he ceased to identify with his own body, and emerged from it all as a deep, gentle, detached yet loving, withdrawn yet amiable personality, who, precisely because he clearly and unmistakably knew himself, could readily identify, through his silence and his smile, with one inquirer after another in the daily procession of devotees who sought in a brief interview light, solace and strength to



live, and who were given one solution to a thousand difficulties: find out your true self, and you will see the way. The answer was effective because the contact was immediate: his transparent personality connected instantly with each one's consciousness, and transmitted something of his own abiding peace to each troubled soul. Only one person is recorded, in the long chronicles of hundreds of interviews published by the ashram, to have left his presence without satisfaction, and that was a Jesuit. A famous French Jesuit, professor of philosophy in nearby Shembaganur, ventured once to visit the sage. Asked by the guru himself whether he had read the twelve-page dialogue "Who Am I?" he admitted he hadn't, and when the guru began to explain to him gently how to initiate the search, he abruptly excused himself as having to catch an early train in a hurry. There is no criticism of the Jesuit professor in the ashram chronicle, yet I was left with an unhappy feeling after reading that page. I wished my brother in religion had established a better relationship with the Indian sage.

"Who am I?" is also a standard exercise to begin group encounters, sensitivity sessions, self-introduction or get-acquainted meetings. Try saying before a group of friends, or just writing down all by yourself, ten sentences beginning each with 'I am...'. The exercise is not always easy, and often brings out an unspoken reluctance, a hidden fear, an inhibiting modesty which tend to preclude self-definition. The difficulty comes from lack of confidence to be able to say plainly and comprehensively who I am, from fear of giving myself away, from the sense of shame to appear naked before others. I can easily give my name and my profession —

while I realize that in giving my name and profession only I've given nothing of myself. To give more is difficult, and the very difficulty of doing it shows in a way the need to do it. The fact that I find it difficult to define who I am makes me realize the need to make it clearer to myself in the first instance. The question, or rather the inquiring attitude embodied in the question Who am I? is the gateway to spiritual realization and to psychological integration. The quest is difficult precisely because it is important.

Every vocation crisis in the life of a priest is, in the last analysis, a personality crisis. The occasion may be attraction to a woman or incompatibility with a superior, but the deeper reason is the long doubt, the growing uncertainty, the nagging question Who am I? Am I really a priest? And what is a priest anyhow? What is my true identity? The question may remain unasked, but deep down in the subconscious it erodes certainties and weakens convictions. If I am not clear and definite about who I am, if I don't understand my own life equation, if I don't assume, balance and integrate all that I am, I'll soon shake and wobble and topple over. A man will act eventually the way he sees himself to be. The day a priest ceases to see himself as a priest, he ceases in his mind to be a priest. The external step will follow sooner or later in one form or another, but the inner decision has already been taken. His identity has changed, and soon his affiliation will change too. What is important is one's perception of oneself. How do I see myself? How do I understand my own person? What is my true identity? Who am I? The mystical question of the sage is also the most practical question for each thinking person. A whole life depends on it.

Here is an example to show how when the perception of one's own identity changes, the direction of one's life changes too. Years ago a bright student from a village joined the first-year class in our college in Ahmedabad. He was truly intelligent and studious, and had maintained throughout his school career the first rank in his class. He was, however, psychologically unprepared for the higher standards demanded of him at college, felt overconfident because of his success in the past, did not adapt to the new rhythm of studies, and as a consequence, when an examination was taken at the end of his first term in college, he failed in it. He never recovered from the blow. He knew himself as the first student in his class. That was his self-image, his own concept of himself, his very identity. And suddenly his identity was shattered to bits. He had failed. He was not any more the first boy in his class. Then who was he? He was so used to that image that he could not function without it. Once he was not any more what he knew himself to be till then, he was utterly lost. If he was not at the head of the class, he could not remain at all in the class. He left his studies, went back to his village, learned a trade and later opened a shop. He was definitely a gifted student, and could still have reacted positively and done well in college. But to himself he was not any more a bright student, and therefore he had to leave his books. His life had to change because his perception of himself had changed. The intimate perception of one's identity, right or wrong as it may be, is the ultimate motive and explanation of important choices and changes in one's life. The cause of a promising student becoming a mere shopkeeper.

If the way I know myself determines the way I



behave, the better I know myself and all that is within me, the better I can rule my life and consciously direct my choices. Of course I know myself already, and years of experience, of self-examination, of welcome and unwelcome feedback from friends and critics have not passed in vain. And yet it is also true, in humility and sincerity, that there is much more to me than I know right now, that I have ignored parts of me and withdrawn from my conscious knowledge fragments of reality which actually can enrich me if I rediscover and reown them. I am still largely an unknown land to myself, and the voyage of discovery is like Chesterton's imaginary voyage to a new land, strange and beautiful, which held him in its charm and in the novelty of its million wonders,—only to make him realize later in surprise and joy that the new beautiful land at whose shore he had unknowingly arrived was his own forgotten and underestimated and abandoned native country. The rediscovery of myself is the greatest, and certainly the most rewarding, adventure in my life.

Pandit Nehru was a great Indian, and his most beautiful book is "The Discovery of India". Brought up in England in the heyday of the empire he had to rediscover his native India, or rather to rediscover himself as an Indian, to bring to life again that most intimate portion of his personality that had been blurred and obscured by the foreign atmosphere of his early years. And the inspired narrative of that discovery is a touching document of deep humanity and intimate growth. By rediscovering himself he found his place in history. The better I know my true self—and this is my last consideration in this introductory chapter—the greater the value of my life for others.



## YOU ARE MY BELOVED SON

We are not alone in our search. Someone else before us asked the question Who am I? with a depth and an earnestness that are guidance and encouragement for us, as well as guarantee of ultimate success in our own endeavour. The richer the personality, I said only a few pages back, the greater the challenge and the importance of self-discovery. Jesus knew that he was one with the Father and that he was the son of Mary. He knew who he was, and he knew it in his human consciousness, growing in self-understanding as he grew in wisdom and grace before God and men. His was the greatest psychological distance between two extremes: God and man. Applying to him, in reverence and worship, the terms of our human analysis we can say that there never was a person with such an identity crisis, a multiple personality of opposite poles as Jesus was. We speak of the hyphenated priest to describe and heighten our problem. His hyphen was greater than any one we know or can ever know in our flesh: God-man. Correspondingly his struggle was also greater,

and we are given glimpses of it from the twelve-year old who abandons the company of Joseph and Mary for "his Father's house", to the agonizing figure under the olives of Gethsemane, engaged in a life and death choice between a man's repugnance to die and a son's readiness to obey. The question Who am I? was to determine again in existential sequence the concrete answer to the question What am I to do?

Jesus himself asked the question Who am I?, and we know he asked the question because we know he was given the answer. "You are my beloved Son." In Nazareth Jesus knew himself in full consciousness, But that consciousness was at the same time that of a boy, an adolescent, a young man in whom the ceaseless wonder of his own growth combined with an extraordinary awareness of man's situation on earth and the knowledge of his own essential role in it. He who knew already the sacredness of "dates and times which the Father has set within his own control" (Ac 1:7), waited and waited while the urge to clarify his being, to find himself in thought and in action, to define his life before his own mind, grew overwhelmingly within him. He recognized the 'fullness of time' in the maturity of his own manhood, in his prayer intimacy with the Father, in the news that reached Nazareth of a new prophet who administered a rite of purification to the crowds that flocked to him in the valley of the Jordan, and he set out with immediate determination on his generous journey south. Nazareth held for Jesus the anchoring memories of life's first thirty years, the tomb of Joseph, the good and just man under whose fatherly care he had become a man, the tender devotedness of his mother, now a widow who lived only for him. But



the need to be himself, to know himself away from home, to delve in solitude and detachment into the mystery of his own self, to hear from the Father the word he alone could pronounce, drove him irresistibly to Aenon near Salim in the Jordan where John was baptizing. There, in the humility of the penitential rite, under the prayer of an inspired prophet, in the nakedness of the running waters, he heard in his whole being the answer to the question that was his life, the assurance of his unique lineage, the words dearest to him in life and in death, the proclamation that was his strength, his comfort, his very being: "You are my beloved Son."

The event of his baptism was a highlight in Jesus' life, an intimate climax of self-understanding, a deep unique experience that launched his mission by defining his person. It is highly instructive, and it helps us to understand Jesus and, in parallel reflection, to understand ourselves better, to pay attention to the different treatment accorded by the four evangelists to this essential event of Jesus' life, to notice the gradual shyness with which they approach the embarrassing mystery, the awkward reality: how could Jesus be baptized? and baptized by John? Mark treats the event exclusively as a personal experience of Jesus without any reference to the crowds. According to him Jesus alone sees the heavens open and the dove descending, and the voice from heaven speaks directly to him: "You are my Son, my beloved; in you I am well pleased." Luke, by the linguistic device of using the passive voice and a generic term, avoids the mention of John the Baptist: "during a general baptism of the people, when Jesus too had been baptized..."; leaves uncertain the question whether the dove and the open heavens were seen by Jesus or by

others, but keeps still the words from heaven as spoken to Jesus: "You are my Son." Matthew introduces the Baptist's protest to safeguard Jesus' dignity: "Do you come to me? I need rather to be baptized by you", and presents the voice from heaven as addressing not Jesus but the crowds: "This is my beloved Son." From a strictly personal experience of Jesus, his baptism has now passed, under that approach, to be primarily a demonstration to the crowd. This obscures the original meaning of the event, its importance for Jesus, its central position in his life story. John goes even further and, while indirectly alluding to Jesus' baptism, omits altogether its description from his gospel. Finally, as an unorthodox curiosity, the apocryphal "Gospel to the Hebrews" makes Jesus answer his relatives who were urging him to go and be baptized by John: "Wherein have I sinned that I should go and be baptized by him?" The difficulty that genuine disciples of Jesus, even some close to him in time, had in understanding his baptism, and their well-meant ways of circumventing it are effect and reflection of the tension Jesus himself experienced within himself in his self-understanding, and in that way are witness in faith and affection to the depth and the riches of his unique personality. The knowledge of Christ is a lifelong task of love for the Christian — because it was so first for Christ.

That his baptism meant much to Jesus becomes clear when we continue to read Luke's narrative after the event. "Full of the Holy Spirit Jesus returned from the Jordan" and went into the wilderness where the devil tempted him—to abuse precisely the power he now knew himself endowed with. "Then Jesus, armed with the power of Spirit, returned to Galilee." In

Nazareth he stood up to preach in the synagogue on the Sabbath, searched for a passage in Isaiah which said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me," read it and began to speak: "This scripture has been fulfilled today in your very hearing." He was full of the new experience, the 'anointing', the Sonship sealed by the communication of the Spirit, and showed that fullness in the wisdom that elicited spontaneous admiration from his reluctant audience, the courage that drew sharp opposition, and the power that freed him from their onslaught. Jesus had found himself at the Jordan, and soon the whole of Judea would know of it.

When his opponents questioned Jesus about the authority on which he acted, he gave an answer which has mystified many readers, and whose ultimate explanation is Jesus' experience at the Jordan: "Tell me first whether the baptism of John was from God or from men, and then I will tell you by which authority I act." (Mk 11:30) Jesus' answer was not a clever repartee to embarrass the questioners and evade a straight answer, but a direct reference to the event at the Jordan where he had fully known himself as the Beloved Son and had been anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power (Ac 10:38). As though he were saying: "My authority to act among you as I do is based on what happened to me at the Jordan; and if you don't accept for a start that John's baptism was from God, you cannot accept my authority either."

At the end of his life, before the final struggle, Jesus wanted to withdraw for a while to some place where his adversaries would not trouble him, and where he could gather strength for the approaching

trial. His choice of place is very significant. "Jesus withdrew across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier. There he stayed." (Jn 10:40) The place where John had been baptizing was precisely the place where Jesus had been baptized. John never speaks directly of Jesus' baptism though he knew about it (1:32), so in his idiom "the place where John had been baptizing" implies "the place where Jesus was baptized." Jesus' chosen refuge before the end was the place dear to him as the stage of the deepest experience that had shaped his life by proclaiming his Sonship. There he stayed.

Jesus continued day by day that intimate contact with his Father that was his very life. He spent long hours in prayer as reflection and continuation of the peak experience at the Jordan, and as daily working out of the understanding of himself that guided his choices and his actions. "No one knows who the Son is except the Father" (Lk 10:22) said Jesus, and so from the Father alone could come the progressive revelation of his own self. That is the deep meaning of Jesus' prayer throughout his life, the need to sacrifice whole nights on the mountain slopes of Galilee, the going back again and again to see himself reflected in the Father, to awaken the echo of the treasured words that defined his life, to be himself again. During the day he was so many things to so many people, preacher, master, healer, friend, public figure, prophet, menace, wonder-worker, so many and so different the faces of his mission, the tone of his voice, the light of his eyes, that then during the night he had to steal time and meet the Father in solitude and silence to be and to feel himself to be his Son again. Jesus knew fatigue and



needed sleep; he could even sleep out of sheer exhaustion in the hull of a boat tossed about by stormy winds; but the need to be himself was greater than the need to rest, and he sought his Father generously in a lifelong contact that was the breath of his life.

Jesus even took the unusual, almost uncharacteristic step of asking his disciples what they thought about him, to ask them the question *Who am I?* He asked them explicitly for reactions and opinions about himself by others and by themselves. This was no mere curiosity or idle gossip. Much less was Jesus playing or testing his disciples as though he knew fully the answer all by himself and were only testing their wits or trying to elicit a confession from Peter for the edification of the rest. No. Jesus is not pretending. Jesus is in earnest. Jesus asks the question because he means it, because he needs an answer, he needs feedback from others, he wants to know what others say of him as background and contrast to his own search. And so he asks directly: "Who do people say I am?" John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah. The first question has gently prepared the way for the second which comes now with greater earnestness: "And you, who do you say I am?" Never had Jesus come so close, so humanly close to his disciples than at this privileged moment when he asks them about himself, waits eagerly for an answer, expects from them some help, some support, some light on what was for him the most important question of his life. And then a beautiful thing happens. Peter answers, that is not Peter, because no flesh and blood could truly know who Jesus is, but the Father answers through Peter, as he answers us through friends and companions in our own search, and repeats in public

reassurance the word Jesus most wanted to hear again and again: Son. "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." A week later, on mount Tabor, Jesus will hear the word again, and with it will go up to Jerusalem to prove himself Son to the end in the face of death.

Jesus felt hurt and even reacted angrily when people took him for granted and claimed to understand him easily. The Hebrew expression to know well a man was "to know where he comes from", and some in the crowd used it of Jesus in controversy to mean that he was well-known to them: "We know where this man comes from." (Jn 7:27) At that Jesus "shouted aloud" in the middle of the crowd gathered round him in the Temple and said: "So you know me and you know where I come from!" There is irony and anger in that cry, the hurt and the remonstrance of a man in constant search of himself faced suddenly with the cheap and quick evaluation of an easygoing unsympathetic crowd. Once some people even asked Jesus directly, "Who are you?" (Jn 8:25) And his answer was so obscure that scholarly versions vary from "Why should I tell you?" to "What I'm telling you." Not much help in any case. It was not easy to know him whose lifelong task was to know himself. Only Jesus could say, "I know where I come from and where I am going" (Jn 8:14), and John said of him on his last night on earth: "Knowing that he had come from God and was returning to God..." (13:3). That knowledge was hard won.

Jesus' Sonship was definitively established and proclaimed in his resurrection. "He was constituted Son of God by a mighty act in that he rose from the dead." (Rom 1:4) His resurrection was the seal on his Sonship,

the consummation of his personality, the ultimate answer to his lifelong search. He was the Son because he had been raised by the Father. The full meaning of his life was revealed when his life came to an end. His triumphal acceptance by the Father proved and constituted his Sonship, and gave meaning and depth to all that had gone before it in Jesus' life. Up to that moment Jesus, so to speak, had lived on credit. His only answer to inquirers was: the end will prove me right; have patience and you will see then. When the Jews asked him for a sign to justify his actions he referred them to his resurrection: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it again." (Jn 2:19) That was a fairly long-range answer. John notes rather wily that even his disciples understood it only after the event. But that was the only possible attitude for Jesus: wait and see; my life will be proclaimed at my resurrection, my person will be understood only when the Father raises me from the dead. "When you have lifted up the Son of Man you will know that I am what I am." (Jn 8:28) The final answer to Who am I? is the resurrection, since for John the 'lifting up' means the cross-resurrection. In raising Jesus from the dead the Father will accept all that he did, confirm all that he said, establish all that he was. Till that moment Jesus has to wait and tell others to wait, and experience in consequence the tension (Lk 12:50) of acting now on an authority that will be justified only later. Like a scientist who knows his discoveries to be true and important, but has to suffer through the opposition, attacks, ironies and misunderstandings of critics and sceptics till the final experiment is performed and proves him right. Even Jesus' miracles are 'signs' only in so far as they anticipate *the* sign of the resurrection, for, as he

was cruelly reminded on the cross, what was the use of saving others if he could not save himself? (Mt 27:42) What value could have the raising of Lazarus if he himself were not raised? Everything in Jesus hinged on his resurrection. The end of his life was the fullness of his self-revelation—as it was the fullness of his self-understanding. "You are my Son; this day I become your Father." (Ps 2:7)

With us too our life will acquire full sense in its final acceptance by the Father. Till then we must bear with our uncertainties, our perplexities, our contradictions. My answer to Who am I? will be my whole life when it is done. Meanwhile I live by faith, I endeavour in prayer and contemplation to see myself reflected in the Father's gaze, to make sense of my multiple experience in the unifying perspective of his providence, to hear from him the words that are also mercifully true of me, "you are my beloved son," and to live in their strength and in their joy. In the search for our own selves, Jesus' experience teaches us that our faith life is the true basis of our own understanding.



## I AM A CHRISTIAN

Only the Father knows the Son and can reveal him to himself. Only the Father knows me truly and can reveal myself to me. "I know you by name." (Ex 33:17) "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." (Jer 1:5) "I saw you under the fig-tree before Philip spoke to you." (Jn 1:48) "To him who is victorious I will give a white stone, and on the stone will be written a new name, known to none but him who receives it." (Rev 2:17) The name, in Hebrew practice, stands for the person, for his character, his mission, his life. My name is my personality, my individuality, my identity, and I receive it from God on a white stone; intimate gift, personal revelation, birthday present for eternal life. Other people may give me other names, have other plans for me, understand my life differently. When John the Baptist was born, his relatives wanted to name the child Zachary. Family tradition, routine, expectation that the child will be what his father is, and will do what he is told to do. But God had other plans. And God said, "His name is John." When God gives a child

his name, he will be great. The hand of the Lord was upon him — as it is upon me too. All I need is to know his name for me, to know his Providence for my life, to know myself from him.

Some years ago a Gujarati monthly to which I contributed reached its hundredth anniversary issue, and its editor invited a hundred writers to write a page each on the single topic 'My Dream'. Those hundred essays were to make up the anniversary issue of the magazine. I was among those invited, and I wrote: "My dream is in reality somebody else's dream for me. When a child is born, indeed before he is born, his loving parents plan and think and dream for him what he will be, what they shall help him be, his career, his successes, his happiness. In that dream there is love and care and support. God is a loving Father, and bringing me into existence in a world he has created and in circumstances he rules, he also dreams for me. 'You will prepare my way and lead my people to salvation through knowledge of me.' (Lk 2:27) A father's fond dream for his child. When I was very young, in my school days already, I used to delight in thinking that God knows my ways and his hand is upon me and he'll lead me and show me what my life is to be under his love and guidance. He had big surprises for me. I became a Jesuit, though my father had never gone to church; I chose to come to India, though the idea of the missions had never appealed to me; I became a writer, though my professional training was in mathematics. And so I keep guessing and enjoying the chapters of my life as they come along, and I tell God not to reveal to me what the next chapter is to be, but to keep up the suspense of the story page by page till the

end, which I anticipate is going to be a thrill. He is a good writer." That was the gist of my article. Some friends told me it looked as though God had a script ready for me and it were left for me only to act it out in my life. I know well that was not my meaning nor my experience. I freely and lovingly discover by living out my days the meaning that holds them together, the message that God has left in each one of them for me to find out and to enjoy and to make God's dream for me come true. I sent my article to the editor, and he chose it to open with it the commemorative issue, and had it printed in first place. Later, when a woman writer, Jyoti Thanaki, judged me a worthy subject for her pen and wrote my biography, she, inspired by that article, called the book "God's Dream". I remember that my first reaction on seeing the title was to recoil from it, not only in horrified shyness, but in pure sense of reality and sanity. But I did concede to her that she had hit upon the fundamental focus of my life, and that it was always in function of God's creation, love and providence that I had made sense of my life. The book "God's Dream" went on to win the government prize for the best biography that year, and its writer and I have ever since been engaged in a courteous battle where I tell her that the prize was entirely due to her skill as a writer, while she self-effacingly maintains that it was the subject matter of the book that won the prize. The title stands. And the fact stands that of the many strands that form my life, and which I want to go on unravelling as I write along, the main one which gives consistency and strength and unity to all the others is the strand of faith in a loving Father who knows and cares, who sees when I go blind, who finds a way when I feel lost, who trusts me even when I don't

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trust myself, who gradually reveals myself to me, who makes me feel a man because he makes me feel I am his beloved son. My first answer to Who am I? is, I am a son of God.

Since I am a son of God, creation is friendly and nature is a home. This is not a hostile world, not enemy country, not a sterile desert, not tearful exile. I am where I belong, and the universe is my patrimony. I have a right to be where I am. I am no foreigner, no stranger, no guest. I am a son in the household. Mankind is a family and the earth is my backyard. I feel at home in the human race and in the solar system. There is a feeling deep within me, through all the pain and the despair and the emptiness and the unsolved riddle of life and the untold sufferings of mankind, a feeling, strong and warm and persisting and irresistible like a tropical current in the depths of the ocean, that life is a blessing, that the world is good, that persons are loving, that human existence has a meaning and that I am here to enjoy it all, to play in my Father's garden under his loving gaze and his unfailing care.

I was once visiting a large industrial estate accompanied by the manager and a group of people among whom was the manager's own son, a charming lad who provided much more interesting commentaries to the different installations than the official information supplied by his father. We climbed a tower in the main building from which we had a bird's-eye view of the huge complex, the industrial sheds, the lorries loading and unloading, the belching chimneys, the sprawling warehouses, the lawns, the avenues, the immense parking lot, crazy quilt of a thousand cars, the boundary trees in the distance. The boy looked at all that with



undisguised pride, waved a hand over the landscape and proclaimed with conviction: "All this belongs to my daddy." There were smiles on some faces, but all kept quiet. He was the boss' son. Every one on the premises knew that. He could go anywhere, and all would greet him and help him and open every door for him. He was safe on the grounds. Nobody would harm him. He was the boss' son. And so am I on this round earth and this starry sky. I am the boss' son. I feel safe and respected, and I can move around and enjoy myself. And let people smile.

My first assignment in mathematical writings was to translate for the Gujarat university G.H. Hardy's 'Pure Mathematics' from English into Gujarati. I was diffident at the time about my ability to do the translation, but I so much liked the book and the author, and so much enjoyed doing mathematics, that I accepted the job. The book is a large treatise Hardy wrote "with the zeal of a missionary preaching to cannibals" (his own words) to restore rigour, exactness and logic to the teaching of mathematics which had universally lapsed by the turn of the century into a laxitude unworthy of the queen of sciences. Written with wit, zest, insight, originality and 'spin' (an undefined quality that Hardy, a cricket enthusiast, sought in his friends, and possessed himself to a supreme degree) the book achieved its purpose, and shook a whole generation of mathematics teachers throughout the English-speaking world into standards of clarity and precision which prepared in spirit the advent of the 'new math'. Hardy's was a bright, elegant, colourful personality which delighted his friends, inspired his students and awed his rivals. He was respected, admired, even feared, and he achieved

social recognition and academic success of the highest kind. And yet, sadly, disappointingly, shockingly, in his old age he attempted suicide. His attempt failed, yet such was his misery that people close to him thought and said it was a pity the attempt had failed. His misery had been due to the waning of his creative faculty in mathematics, for which alone he had lived. He had collaborated with Littlewood and Ramanujan, had discovered original results, had dominated research in pure mathematics in the Commonwealth for a generation. But with the dimming of his intellect came the realization that he couldn't do any more what he had been doing all his life. And he had nothing else to live for. He had no intimate friends (the most demonstrative expression his closest friend, C.P. Snow, remembered ever having heard from him was when Hardy in his sickbed after his attempt at suicide told him that he looked forward to his visits), he never married, and early in life he had declared, with the definiteness and finality that characterized his decisions, that he did not believe in God. Work, affection and faith are the three grounds on which a man's happiness, and, if he is highly sensitive, his very sanity, rest. If the three are missing, the situation may invite despair. I don't want to capitalize on a man's misery, much less indulge in cheap apologetics and thunder away at the plight of the atheist who has only despair and suicide waiting for him. Far from it. I have known happy atheists and miserable believers in my life. All I want here, in respect and reverence before suffering and the mystery of life and the awesome responsibility of the individual conscience, is to point out in a case which affected me deeply because of the personal admiration I always felt for that extraordinary man, the

blank and the void that the absence of God can cause in a man's life. The need of meaning, of direction, of a ground to stand on and of a horizon to scan with hope, is a basic need for every thinking man. A satisfactory relationship with God fulfills that need. Without such a personal relationship that vital need is not easily met. Professional success and a rich affective life can to some extent fill in the gap for a time. But if they too fail, the end may be disaster and the overdose of barbiturates. It was so with G.H. Hardy. When his attempt failed, because he took too many barbiturates and vomited, he meekly promised he wouldn't try to kill himself again. He wasn't even good at that, he admitted.

I once conducted the following experiment with a group of young men of different religions to drive home to them the need of perspective, of balance, of a long view of things, of a vision of life based in faith. I gave each of them a sheet of paper and a pencil, and I asked each to draw a picture of himself and of his life as he saw it himself. I expected no work of art, I explained, but just a symbolic sketch of self-understanding. Most of them drew the picture of a man with some special characteristic or other; a few produced a sort of composite picture or group picture where they appeared in the midst of their family or companions at work; and one or two put together on their sheet a number of scenes that highlighted their own life from birth to the present moment. We saw all the drawings together, and then I told them the story of the Indian king who built a palace. It was the most magnificent palace that had ever been built on earth, and when it was completed the king felt the desire to have its picture drawn by the greatest master of the art.

The master had already retired and lived in the forest, but agreed to take up his brush again in service to the crown and the people. The king instructed him to draw the palace in all detail and exactness as it was in reality, and the master put as the only condition that nobody should look at the painting till it was fully completed. The condition was accepted, and the master went to work in solitude. After a number of days he called the king and unveiled the finished painting before him. The king looked in wonder. On a large canvas he saw a painting of a forest and a mountain and a winding river and a deep blue sky. A truly magnificent painting it was. "But", exclaimed the king when he recovered from his surprise and found speech, "where is my palace?" The master smiled and pointed gently: "If your majesty will look carefully, there at the foot of the mountain, on the edge of the forest, by the curve of the river there is a tiny little dot. That is your palace." And when the king's contorted face continued to express unamused wonderment, he added: "Your majesty asked me to paint his palace exactly as it is in reality. In the reality of God's creation, your palace is only a tiny little dot. If however your majesty will deign to look at that dot with a magnifying glass, your majesty will satisfy himself that not a single detail is missing from the palace." Such was the art of the great Indian painters. And such was the wisdom that saw man's life against the eternal background of God's providence. The king expected the picture of his palace to fill up the whole canvas. Man stretches the image of himself to take up all his consciousness. And trouble follows. The palace may burn, may be shaken by an earthquake or destroyed by an army. And eventually it has to be left behind in death. Thus the king lives in fear



and dies in pain. It is the large view that gives balance, wholeness and peace. It is the landscape of faith that gives depth, relevance and stability to human life. To teach that lesson to the king, the master painter agreed to come out of his retirement in the forest. And to set a few young men thinking on the basis of their true identity I told them his story. We all need a lesson in perspective to draw our self-portrait "as it is in reality".

My own religious perspective is the Christian perspective. I am a Christian. That has meant for me birth in a Christian family, baptism as a child, the 'discovery' of the gospels in my adolescence, an intense personal relationship with Jesus as an intimate friend through life, the charismatic experience in the fulness of my manhood with all its blissful fervour, the support, and at times the burden, of the institutional church, and an outlook, a way of life, a set of values that form the fundamental frame of reference for my thinking and my acting. A sense of loyalty and a stress on experience. To be a Christian is in biblical definition to be a witness of the resurrection (Ac 1:22), to testify by one's life and conviction, by direct knowledge and personal evidence that Jesus is alive today. That is what Peter and John and James did on Easter Sunday: they met Jesus and they said so; and that is what makes me a Christian today. Not just to quote Peter and John and James, but to seek myself, in faith and humility, the personal encounter with the living Christ that brings to life the reality given me in the sacramental rite. Already the Coptic fathers in their day deplored that Christians by then had become like dogs that follow dogs that follow dogs that follow the hare. With the result that not a few dropped out of the race. Second-

hand Christians. Followers of followers. Hearsay evidence. Diluted Christianity. That is not the power of the Spirit. "It is your face, O Lord, that I seek; hide not your face." (Ps 27:8) For years I was diffident and afraid to make such a prayer, to take it seriously, to live up to it, and I thought it presumptuous and dangerous to seek experience where faith alone should be enough. That was underestimating the power and the love of God who has the means and the desire to reach the heart of man as Lord and Father, and does so in unmistakable and inexpressible ways. Ignatius after Cardoner repeated that even if the Bible and all religious books were taken from him, he would continue to believe with the same faith on the strength of the experience that had filled his soul by the side of the river in a turn of the waters "where the river runs deep"; and, saving distances and keeping proportions, it is duty and privilege for each one of us to reach the same conviction and treasure the same evidence. "Jesus whom we seek, as St. Ignatius sought, to experience." (General Congregation 32). Personalized dogma. Internalized religion. Living faith. "We are the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob." (Ps 24:6) "I am a Christian" means, simply and deeply, "I have seen the Lord." The credentials of John are, allowing for differences in time and circumstance, the very definition of a Christian: "What was there from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, what we have looked upon and have touched with our own hands—of this we tell. We tell of the word of life. Life was made visible, and we have seen it and bear our witness. What we have seen and heard we announce to you." (1 Jn 1:1-3) The gospel is the Good News, and

news are today's events. I am a Christian in as far as the message and the person of Christ become news in my life.

The Christian experience includes one more Who am I?, unpopular and even dangerous in its expression, but direct and unavoidable in its reality: I am a sinner. The statement can be misunderstood and has often been abused. I myself in my early ministry of retreats for Jesuits revelled with misguided zeal in creating guilt feelings, split personalities, the opposition between the 'old man' and the 'new', an inferiority complex whenever possible, and even self-contempt and self-hatred. It is easy, and viciously satisfying for an immature director, to manipulate docile consciences into feeling guilty in order to feel redeemed, to impose fetters in order to take credit for removing them, to enslave in order to liberate. Manipulation through guilt is a disguised and dangerous power game in which we priests are prone to indulge under uncleansed motives. It took me much reflection and painful analysis to clean and purify my talks on sin from all the unhealthy morbidity that had crept into them. When that is done, the stark fact remains and stares us straight in the face: something is amiss with man as he is today, with society, with the world. A tide of suffering engulfs mankind, and in its sombre depth is that awesome reality (or rather, philosophically, that negation of reality) which we call unrighteousness, malice, moral evil, sin. I see round me hatred, violence, oppression, feuds between brothers and war between nations, blood and bondage and death. The inability of man to be what he would like to be, the compulsion to hurt, the senseless agonies, the misery of millions and

the helplessness of all. And I recognize the roots of all that evil in the hearts of men, in my own heart. I, for all my upbringing, my spirituality, my ascetical training and my vocation to serve, sense deep within me the irrational pull, the blind instinct, the unholy pride, the unmitigated selfishness that are the seeds of violence in the world. The hurtful acts I commit are not just excusable accidents in an otherwise worthy existence, on the contrary, they are the obvious manifestations of the dark principle that is inside me and is part of me; my own unwilling self, the villain in me, or rather myself, the whole of me under the lawless insanity that inexplicably and undeniably takes hold of me. Saying it bluntly and theologically, it is not that I am a sinner because I sin, but that I sin because I am a sinner. The root is in me, and the bitter fruit only bears witness to its origin.

The power of evil manifests its ultimate nature in the curse of addiction: the blind compulsion that takes hold of a man against his best self, and ruthlessly, madly, inexorably makes him do things he hates doing, behave as he has promised himself a thousand times he will not behave. The big addictions like drink, sex, drugs, power; or the smaller ones of mood, temper, sloth, cynicism. Whatever marks a man, cripples him, undermines his character, lowers his self-respect, destroys his very self. "The vulture in our veins", "the monkey on our backs" in drug-addict language which ominously applies to all other addictions. The bitter irony of sin is that it is not a situation of freedom, as it purports to be, but of unfreedom. It is not "I do what I please", but "I am powerless to do what I truly and genuinely would like to do." It is not freedom but determinism, not liberty but



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bondage, not independence but slavery. Paul personifies Sin in singular as a foreign power which rules the human situation as king (Rom 5:21), master (6:14), slave-owner (7:14), jailor (Gal 3:22) under whom man is a mere chattel unable to live in freedom and to act at will. "It is not longer I who act, but Sin that dwells in me." (Rom 7:17) An alien power that takes possession of our faculties and bends them to work for it against our will. A tale of helplessness, captivity and death. "I am betrothed unto thy enemy." (John Donne)

Sometimes in my life I've hurt my mother whom I love more than anything on earth. And every time when coming back at once to my senses I've asked myself in anguished bewilderment: How can I have done that? how can I have been so insensitive, so mean, so cruel? and that with the person I most care for, I tenderly love, I devotedly serve? I was not myself. And yet I was. I am always the whole of me, even what I don't understand in me, what I mistrust in me, what I am inclined to reject and tempted to disown in me. I am even the dark me, the sinful me, the unacceptable me. I am myself even when I am not myself. And now I want to bring that less loveable part of me to full awareness before my eyes; not to ignore it, avoid it, gloss over it any longer; but to know it, to face it, to contemplate it; and then, bravely and unconditionally, to accept it. Acceptance is made possible and rendered easier by the fact of faith that God, who knows the worst of me, accepts me and loves me fully as I am. That is the very basis of religious belief. And if God accepts me, who am I to reject myself? If the Judge absolves, who is there to condemn? And, more deeply, if the Father embraces me, rags and all, and brings me

again unhesitatingly into the intimacy of the family and into the joy of the home, how can I still call myself a stranger and a servant? When Paul laboured under a personal trial that brought him pain and shame, and asked for its removal, he obtained an unexpected answer: "My grace is enough for you. Power is manifested in weakness." (2 Cor 12:9) This is no promise to remove the temptation or even to grant victory in it; rather, the assurance that whatever the outcome, God's favour (that is what the word 'grace' means) will always be present. As though he said, "It is enough for you to know that, whatever your weakness, my favour is always with you." It is enough for me to know that God always loves me as I am. Indeed, my very weakness, known and recognized and accepted, brings me mercifully closer to God and lays me open to his redemptive action. Jesus said he had come to call sinners, not the 'righteous'. Unless he washes my feet, I cannot be one with him. Until I can say from the heart the 'I confess', I cannot sit at table with him. The recognition of my unworthiness is no obstacle to my acceptance by God — and hence by myself; on the contrary, it is a happy condition and a paradoxical help. I need not be afraid now of anything in me. I take it all and embrace it all. Everything is me; everything without exception, light and shadow, high and low, fair and foul, precious and worthless, whatever I have known and experienced and been, integrates within me and forms me and *is* me. I want to know and to rescue and to own and to treasure every bit of myself. To build the mosaic of my life by giving in it its value and its place to every tile.

One more tile. The contrast, in shape and in colour, to the sinner motif. With Paul again, who called

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all his Christians, whose earthly condition he thoroughly knew, universally and unreservedly 'saints', I, aware of the pregnant contradiction that makes up my very being, claim in joyful confidence the exalted title. I am a saint. And as I begin to collect contradictory titles I get the feeling that I'm beginning to get somewhere. Because whatever I am, I am a contradiction.





## I AM MY MOTHER'S SON

I see myself in the little narrow-gauge train that runs along a green valley of arresting beauty in the north of Spain. The train takes its name from the river whose twisted course it parallels, railway tracks rhythmically dialoguing with the playful waters: the Urola. Its importance for me lies in a small station that comes up almost unexpectedly after a sharp curve of the railway line. On its board a single name: Loyola. I am on that train. I am fifteen years old. I am sitting in a second-class compartment, and on the luggage rack above me I have placed a middle-sized suitcase and an umbrella. By my side is my mother. She had told me: "Son, every year at this time when you go to the boarding to continue your studies, I come with you to place you there and to entrust you to your teachers. This year you are going to join the novitiate, to consecrate your life to God with the Jesuit fathers. I want to come also with you to offer you to God. It is my offering too." So she has come and is now sitting in the train by my side. In the seat in front of me is my brother. He too has

come to see me off. Our family is only the three of us. My father had died five years before, and his untimely death, together with the difficulties we had to go through in the hard days of post-war Spain, had brought the three of us very close together. Closer perhaps than I myself realized at the time. I am still puzzled today when I think of that train journey and I remember with inescapable clarity that my unmixed feeling throughout the trip was one of blind exhilaration. I was taking leave of my mother and my brother for a life-long separation which only short occasional visits would temper. And I was not sad. In fact I remember I was so intoxicated with sheer joy that I stood up and jumped inside the train, giving myself a knock in the head which hurt badly, though I turned the mishap itself into merriment. Nothing would dampen my spirits. Today, with the long perspective of many years and some knowledge of human nature, I interpret those antics as a desperate effort of my subconscious to shield me from the pain. The stilling of the hurt. The balm on the wound. The anaesthetics of an operation. While leaving my mother I was in a real daze created by the exalted feeling that I was consecrating my life to the service of God, and that such a vocation entitled me to ignore everybody's feelings. God was calling me and nothing would stand in the way. The anaesthetics took years to wear off. Then the pain was all the greater for not having felt it first. That bump on my head has hurt me much more in later years than it did that day while jumping in the compartment of the Urola railway.

We reached Loyola. For our last lunch together we went to a small hotel. The owner was a kind lady

who eyed us with maternal solicitude and asked my mother straight-away: "Have you come to leave your son with the fathers?" I wondered how she knew. But she had obvious experience of such visits, and we looked the part. If nothing else, my umbrella had given me away. Young people don't carry umbrellas, and less in fair weather. But it was among the things we had been asked to bring to the novitiate, and my obedience had already begun to prove itself. During our lunch my brother took a photo of my mother and me, a photo which, to my mother's everlasting regret, was marred by a double exposure. But double exposure and all, she has kept it and still shows it to me with a feeling whose full depth I shall never entirely understand, though every time I gauge a little more. On my face in that photograph is that dazed blissful smile which hid my feelings even from myself.

We went to the 'sanctuary', as all called it there. The imposing dome of the basilica that presides over the whole valley. Legend has it that the huge mountain that flanks the valley, the Izarraitz, whose summit I would climb endless times as a novice, was made with the stones that were left over after building the dome. We were taken to the room, now chapel, that became the turning point in the life of the man whom I from now on would call 'father'. Against the wall the life-size wood carving of a knight with a wounded leg, a book in his hand, and on his uplifted eyes an enlightened gaze. On top, the words: "Here Ignatius Loyola turned his life to God." We knelt down. After a while the father by my side signalled me to get up and follow him. My mother remained praying. I don't know when she left. Many years later she told me she had wept in the train all the way back home.

I was a Jesuit. By an unexpected coincidence, the thirty-day retreat novices go through as first fundamental stage in a long formal training, began that same night, only a few hours after I joined. I plunged cheerfully into it. I don't remember much of those thirty days except, vividly, the wave of happiness that continued to sweep over me day after day even in the isolation of my room. When the morning bell rang mercilessly at 5 a.m. I would stand on my bed and jump high repeatedly—now without hitting the ceiling—shouting loudly to myself: "I am the happiest man in the world!" I can only wonder now at the overwhelming power of religious motivation and the strength of a priestly calling which can take preference with ease over everything else on earth, even man's deepest feelings and strongest needs. I feel a little awed when I think now of that.

Detachment from our families was one of the first principles impressed upon us. Only four letters a year: Christmas, Easter, birthdays of parents; and those letters to be handed open to the novice master who read them carefully and commented back to us on what we had written. I guess those comments of his were just intended to let us know that he did read our letters. That knowledge was a damper on our feelings, and the letters, instead of expressions of affection became little sermons meant to improve the lives of our people at home, or rather meant to impress favourably the censor who was sure to read them. The basic need of a novice is to please his novice master on whose approval hangs his future, and our letters were consequently programmed to give him satisfaction rather than to express affection to our parents. Such expressions of

affection were frowned upon, and a certain external coolness towards one's family was regarded as a clear sign of spiritual advancement. Rule number eight quoted in unmitigated translation the hard saying of Jesus in the gospels: "He who comes after me and does not hate his father and mother, is not worthy of me" (Lk 14:26), with the conclusion that Jesus was to be to the Jesuit "father and mother and everything else." Family ties were not broken, but were certainly weakened in that atmosphere of total renunciation. When my mother came to visit me the next year, saw me for the first time in a cassock, and after being with me for a set number of hours morning and evening, she wanted to remain one day more to see me again, the novice master informed her that she could not see me the next day. My mother very mildly mentioned that she had come from far and it would be a full year till she could come again. Couldn't she have a short meeting with me the next day? The novice master refused the permission. She had to leave the next day without seeing me. And I approved of the novice master's decision. I was a good novice.

Another memory. Sweet and sour. I was already a 'scholastic' doing my philosophy in the wild solitude of an imposing abbey which had been a Benedictine monastery before the Jesuits acquired it, and became a lunatic asylum after they sold it out. My mother and brother came to see me there. We met. My mother had brought along a parcel and after the initial greetings with their mixture of repressed emotion and shy intimacy, she opened it. It was a cake made by herself which she knew I liked very much as a boy. She uncovered it and looked at me with eyes full of love and



tenderness, saying nothing in loving expectation of my joy. And yet my first reaction, in a way inexplicable and in a way obvious, was anger. Holy anger. How did she dare to bring eatables into the parlour! It was strictly forbidden. And did she think I was a child and cared still for such a despicable temptation as a piece of cake? Whom did she take me for? I actually scolded her for having brought the cake, and asked her to take it back. She looked the very image of pity and helplessness, with the cake opened in her lap, and on her face utter unbelief as to what her ears were hearing. Her heart just refused to believe that I would not eat the cake. For all my pride and my self-righteousness I saw that expression and I relented. I ate the cake. And I did so in utter and helpless confusion of feelings. I did like the cake, I felt guilty eating it, I was afraid somebody would see me, I was angry with myself for having yielded, I knew I had broken a rule, and yet I somehow felt I had done the right thing and I could not have done otherwise. The confusion of my feelings was a clear witness to the awkwardness of the situation, the unnatural effort to untie the strongest tie on earth, to loosen the closest bond of life. Those short visits once or twice a year served to renew the undeniable love the three of us bore one another, and also helplessly to emphasize the growing distance between us. The longer the time between visits, the less we had to talk about. I looked forward to each visit, felt happy and frustrated, reserved and impatient during it, and deeply sad after it, blaming myself for not having shown myself more affectionate and loving towards them as I truly was. I firmly proposed to be more loving next time—only to cool down strangely at the next visit again. And there was no one to explain my feelings to me then.

I'm quite clear in my mind about my motives in setting down these memories here. I have no intention to blame anybody, least of all myself, or to pass judgment on a particular ideology, mentality or way of life which were once mine. I never disown my past. The stern discipline that marked the first many years of my life is part of me even when I have outgrown it, and what I am now is largely due to it. I love my past because I love my present. The reason for me to bring these memories here is to make it clear how I lost part of me in a very important and fundamental matter, and how I found that lost part again. This process of losing and finding, of rejecting and re-owning, is the very makeup of personality, and I have experienced it sharply in this vital instance. To a large extent I lost myself as part of my family, I ceased to know their daily worries and their intimate joys, I limited my duties to praying for them in general, content in the traditional belief that God blesses a family that has a son in his service. I missed the pain and the joy of growing up day by day in the midst of a loving family. I became detached and aloof. When many years later I rediscovered myself as a member of my family, when I let my love for my people flower up again in full bloom in my heart, and I saw myself again as son and as brother in full right, I experienced a feeling as though a limb in my body that had gone dead had come to life again. It is that process that I want to highlight here, and that makes me mention those memories. I am also conscious of another effect the writing of these memories is having on me, and that is the healing effect of making explicit to myself events of the past that had left a scar on my soul, of remembering without hurt and without regret episodes that had darkened my past, of healing memories by

simply and unreservedly telling them. Writing is therapy. Remembering with love is closing wounds. This applies particularly to the memory that follows, perhaps the most poignant in my whole life.

I was about to finish my philosophy studies. The provincial was to come and give us the appointments that would mark our future. He later told me he had thought of sending me to study scripture as a preparation for the responsible job of teaching and directing young Jesuits for life, or perhaps to study law and take a doctorate for our law college, he was not quite sure yet; but in any case, before he could tell me anything, something happened. A Jesuit friend I loved dearly talked me into applying to be sent to the foreign missions. I had never cared for the missions in all my life, but I saw the point in my friend's argument — if only because I loved him so much and liked to listen to him. I had left the 'world' in order to serve God. But now that 'world' was getting slyly into my life through the back door, in the shape of the success I was achieving as a Jesuit student and the appreciation and esteem by superiors and equals that such success was bringing me. If I had given up everything to love Jesus, I had to give up this new 'world' too. As I had left my home and family, I had now to leave my country for a perfect sacrifice, and go to a place where no one would know me, where a new language would dampen my gifts, where I would lead an obscure life of service and devotion, unknown and ignored. That further renunciation would bring me closer to God, which was the only aim of my life. I saw the point with youthful generosity. I wrote to the provincial. He answered by return of post appointing me to India.

I wrote the news to my mother. To go to the missions in those days meant never to come back, and the farewell was for ever. Jet travel had not yet arrived, and the song we sang at each farewell of a new batch of missionaries harped morbidly on the last look on one's country, one's friends, one's mother. With that background I wrote. I did surmise that the parting would be hard for her. True, we hadn't met much those last years, but we knew we were not far from each other; while now the distance would be forbidding, and the separation complete. Yet I wrote a rather formal letter where I told her she had to be proud to have been chosen to be the mother of a missionary, and I added rather cleverly, that just as Jesus, before his final parting, had entrusted his mother to his closest disciple, so I now, in turn, was entrusting her to Jesus who would look after her far better than I would ever have been able to do. I felt very pleased with myself at that time about that letter. Today I wish I had written instead a line of sincere affection, of direct appreciation of her pain and expression of mine. But then I was still under the influence of the policy of detachment required by the spirituality I had learnt. As when leaving home for the first time, religious enthusiasm had again deadened my own feelings. How I wish now I had wept at least once when taking leave of my mother!

And then took place the incident I recall to this day as the most distressing in my life. I was to go to Madrid to take the plane for India with twenty-two other Jesuits who made up that year's batch of missionaries. My mother and brother lived in Madrid, and I, while staying at a Jesuit house there, would be able to see them before my departure the next day. That was a

very short time, and my mother, to make the most of it, had written that she and my brother would be at the railway station waiting for my train. Then I did something senseless. I wrote to them that I would go straight to the Jesuit house and they should come to meet me there. I guessed they would not heed my request and they would still go to the station, and I decided to teach them a lesson. When the train arrived at the station I alighted at once, made straight for the exit and jumped into a taxi. I went straight to the Jesuit house and waited there.

The worst had happened. My mother and brother had both gone to the station well in time and were walking the platform in wait for me. They missed me in the long train, waited till the last traveller was gone, and even stayed for a later train in case I was coming in it. Finally tired and disappointed they came two hours later to the Jesuit house. They were keen on meeting me soon because my brother had to leave the next morning peremptorily for military service and would not be able to come to the airport to give me the last farewell and strengthen mother. They said all this and very gently remonstrated with me. My mother's loving reproach was lost on me. I was sure I had done the right thing and was proud of it. I sat with them for some time, and then went with them to the door. It was raining heavily. The last image I have is of my brother unsuccessfully trying to hail a taxi in the rain. Finally they had to walk. My mother came next day alone to the airport. My brother I didn't see for many years after that parting in the rain. In the hurry and the confusion we hadn't even properly said goodbye to each other.



I just don't understand today how I can have behaved like that. Still less how I didn't experience the slightest remorse at the time nor for years after that. I was dazed, drugged, rendered senseless and emotionless. And I felt very holy. Yet, curiously, mysteriously, inexorably, down in my subconscious, deep under the layers of piety and religiosity that covered up my behaviour, a sorrow had been felt, a pain had been registered, a wound had been opened; and many years later, when in maturity and freedom I learnt to know myself better, to uncover my own motives, to analyse my attitudes and to unmask my excuses, the memory of that fateful day shot like a burning arrow through the cavities of my soul, and tortured in ruthless memory the helpless heart which by then had recovered the sensitivity it was always meant to have. The railway station. The rain. The unsaid goodbye. The sorrow for not having felt sorrow. The pain for having inflicted pain. When I see now the photos my mother has kept from the farewell at the airport the next day, and I see her face in them, I am struck today by the strained expression, the forced smile, the beauty of her face distorted in a silent agony she alone could understand. I missed all that on that day. I saw her face but I missed her feelings. I met her eyes but I ignored their message. Only those photographs have preserved for me the silent testimony of her intimate pain. I am not exaggerating when I say that to a large extent that essential part of me which is being my mother's son and my brother's brother was lost to my conscious experience and to my affective awareness for years.

Nor am I alone in the experience. I have received the confidences of many Jesuits along many years, and

the theme of unsatisfactory relationship with one's parents, farewell traumas, ambivalent feelings, difficulty to fit again as Jesuits into their families, detachment and involvement, absences and visits, tenderness and resentment, and the sheer confusion of belonging and not belonging, has been an ever recurring theme. One Jesuit told me that, though his parents had blessed his vocation, to begin his new life in a heroic way and to show his independence from the start he left for the novitiate on the sly, quitting his home at night without a word to anyone. And he added that he could never forgive himself in all his life for having done that. Another punished his parents by not writing to them for years. Still another refused to stay in his parents' home when he went to his native place for his first Mass. And misunderstandings, estrangements, holding back of feelings, temporary quarrels and permanent misgivings without end. History knows that the relationship of Francis of Assisi with his father, Pietro Bernardone, broke for ever after a law-suit—with the son giving back to his father even the clothes he was wearing. My own details are mine, as mine is the intensity with which I've lived this situation, but the experience as such is general. By being autobiographical I'm just being universal. We all need to rediscover our parents.

When I woke up to that reality I woke up fast. I was now a grown-up Jesuit, successful in my work, secure in my profession, ready to take in new situations and free to react to them. I was invited to a mathematics congress in Moscow, and, once in Europe, I went to Madrid and stayed with my mother and brother. I was back in Spain after seventeen years, and back in my mother's house after twentyfive. A gap of

twentyfive years is not easily filled up. The first contacts were hesitant, tentative, awkward. The repressed affection that struggled to burst through, and the reluctance that held it in. The beginnings were not smooth. But a beginning was made. And then almost every year I got new invitations to attend mathematical meetings, and then to undertake lecture tours among groups of Indians abroad. I accepted invitations to Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania, Malawi, South Africa, England, Canada, the U.S. And every time I went out I made it a point to go home and stay with my mother. Little by little I established a new relationship with her. I learnt to talk with her, to sit by her side, to speak of my life to her and to listen to her telling me things I never knew about myself and her and my infancy and our first years together, to comment on everything with her, to spend long times with her, to pray with her, to say Mass daily for her. I read to her, translating as I read, chapters from my Gujarati books; I showed her letters readers and admirers write to me where they tell me to thank her for having given me to India; I spoke to her about my friends in India, and she even wrote to them when I wrote, came to know them all and to love them with me. And then I helped her in her old-age wants in every way I could, and always chiefly through my presence. The family doctor who visits her regularly told her after a checkup when I was there: "You've got now a medicine better than any I can prescribe." And my mother herself told me spontaneously one day after an intimate while together: "God bless you, my son. You make me so happy now." In making her happy I too had found new happiness.

I have mentioned that my father died when I was

a boy. With him there has been no process of losing and finding, except in another way: I have come to realize only now later in life the decisive influence he has exerted on me though he left me so early. The habit of hard work, the commitment to excellence, the eschewing of all kind of hypocrisy and deceit I have definitely got from him. With my brother I did go through the lost-and-found experience, again in a very intense way. He is only two years older than I, we have no other brothers and no sister, we had been very close to each other till the day I joined the Jesuits. Then we grew separately, each in his own sphere of achievement and success. Parallel yet poles apart. And then I went to India. Distance in miles, in ideas, in experiences no longer lived together. We exchanged news and greetings in regular letters. But the letters were never satisfactory. Each letter was a witness to the desire of growing together, and to the helpless impossibility to do it. The years passed and the distance increased. Then came the first meeting. A sharp memory in my mind.

I am standing in the visitors' balcony in Bombay airport. The plane from Europe has just landed and is taxiing slowly to its predestined spot on the apron. Deftly it toes the arrow. It reaches the line. Its huge body stops. The engines fall silent. Ladders approach. Doors swing open. My heart beats fast (it is beating fast again as I am writing this twentyfive years later). Passengers begin to file out. I look intently, with all my heart in my eyes. A lanky figure is framed for an instant against the open door. I haven't seen him for years, but my blood jumps in my throat. He lifts his hand. He has seen me. I cry. He is my brother. Years later when we

shared this memory in retrospect, he told me he too cried at that moment down the steps of the Air India ladder. But it took years for us to share that memory.

The meeting was intensely happy and unavoidably awkward. The long absence had made almost strangers of us while it had secretly increased our love for each other. Our hearts beat together while our minds diverged. We shared feelings but we didn't share backgrounds any more. We groped. We tried. We disagreed. We clung together. We began the delicate task of building up a new relationship on the ruins of the old. It took several years and repeated meetings to do it. As we began to come closer together we experienced the finer grain of two strong personalities rubbing each other into adjustment. There was great mutual appreciation between us and deep love. But unexpressed. Brotherly reticence and manly toughness and inhibited expression. There was some friction, domestic competition, an elder-brother complex to dominate, and in me a younger brother's oversensitivity to interference. We clashed more than once precisely because we were coming closer and closer. Then on one of my trips something happened that opened my eyes, broke the dykes and made my blood recognize itself in his. I was coming back to India after a trip abroad and some time at home. My brother and I were alone at the back of the taxi that was taking me to the airport. In that unlikely setting he started to tell me how much my visit had meant to him and how he was enjoying the intimacy we were now gaining year by year and wanted it to grow into the closest relationship. And then spontaneously, unpreparedly, almost in passing and without preparation, he told me something that I had never



known and that, on knowing it now, touched a deep chord in me and brought suddenly to light all the closeness that had been growing in me for years now. He said: "I've never told you through all these years and you may not know it, but when you left us to go to the novitiate your going was for me such a blow that I never quite recovered. You were more than a brother to me, and your loss to me was the greatest loss I could imagine. I didn't understand your vocation, your going, your enthusiasm. I didn't understand anything. I just resented the Jesuits that took you from me, as I later resented India which took you even farther. I have never reconciled myself to your loss, and now that I see you coming back to us and to me, I rejoice with all my heart and want to remake with you our life together, close to each other as we were always meant to be."

Those were beautiful words to hear. He had loved me all along more than I had imagined. My nature is to respond to love shown to me with all the strength of my heart, and from that moment I knew I had recovered the unique place I hold in my brother's life and he in mine. There is a curious fact of nature which to me has signified and emphasized this meeting of our lives after long divergent years, and has left me wondering on the uncanny ways in which the body expresses the soul—or maybe the soul follows the body. In our infancy, childhood and adolescence, we two brothers looked very different from each other, as dozens of photographs kept at home certify, and nobody who didn't know us would have taken us for brothers. However in later life, and now to an extraordinary degree we look alike, almost like twins, and

people even mistake us at times for each other. In spite of distance and time and estrangement and differences, a hidden chemistry has worked out infallibly into our very bodies the kinship that was there latent from the beginning. Blood tells in the end.

One day in one of my journeys the three of us, mother, brother and I, were walking of an evening in the empty streets of a small village in the north of Spain whose name, *Sos del Rey Catolico*, testifies to its being the birthplace of king Ferdinand, husband of Isabella, both royal patrons of Christopher Columbus in his Atlantic voyage to a new world. The streets were steep and well paved with shining cobblestones, and as we walked my brother and I held my mother's arms in careful grip one at each side of her to assist her step. She is very small and frail while my brother and I are both tall as our father was. We were just visiting the village, where we knew nobody, while touring the North for me to see places of Spain I'd never seen before. We met nobody in the silent village till we came to a long street where a woman dressed in black was coming towards us, obviously going to the church we had just left. She came close, looked at us, guessed our obvious relationship, stopped for a moment, and with that free spontaneity of village folk who need no introductions and wait for no formalities, she addressed my mother and said aloud: "That's good company for an old lady God has given you. God bless the three of you." We three smiled back our surprise and our gratitude, without words to cover up the happy embarrassment. I just felt the grip of my mother's hand tighten on mine. I couldn't speak either.

One final remark to end this important matter. The process of losing and finding again our parents is not an exclusive experience of religious and priests. Any man or woman who marries, leaves a home and starts another, experiences sooner or later the need to establish a new relationship with his parents, to revalue his past with them, to find anew their place in his life. We all need to rediscover our parents, or rather, to rediscover ourselves as our parents' children. The painful reality is that in order to rediscover our parents we have first to lose them. Through religious profession, through marriage, through quarrels, through rebellion, through distance, through absence we all have first to lose that most vital contact of our lives, our umbilical sacred maternal bond in order to find it again in happy fulfillment of our independent being. For me the rediscovery of myself as my mother's son has been one of the most blessed events of my whole life.

When I wrote this chapter in manuscript I went to my mother (I was in her house then), sat by her side and read it out to her, translating into Spanish as I read. She was knitting while listening, but after a few sentences she put down her knitting and listened intently. When I finished she silently drew my head close to her and kissed me.

## I AM A 'VAISHNAV'

Someone parodied Ortega y Gasset's dictum which I used some pages back, "I am I and my circumstance", by translating it into the modern situation: "I am I and my passport." The piece of paper without which I don't exist officially. The document that identifies me, that allows me to travel, that enables me to prove that I am I. I remember my fright when on arrival in Moscow my passport was taken by the receptionist to enter my data in the hotel register, and was not returned to me, for all my protestations, till the moment of my departure ten days later. I felt lost without my passport in a foreign country. And I remember my relief when I discovered that the thief who had broken into my room in a Jesuit house in Rome and had taken away my valise with all the money and things in it, had first carefully removed my passport and had left it conspicuously on my table as the professional touch of a thoughtful thief. The passport is important.

And yet the passport is only that — a piece of paper.

Nationality is an artificial concept. Boundaries between nations are whimsical, traced at random and changed at will. A person born in Dacca before 1947 was first officially a British subject while at heart an Indian patriot, then for some years a Pakistani, and now a Bangladeshi. Four nationalities in a lifetime. A little too much to be taken seriously. And older countries are not better off: by pushing history a little further back every country was some other country at some other time—and then no country at all. And now the citizens of that country are asked to rise to defend with their blood what never was there for a start. The nation is a practical administrative concept which has been distorted into something to die for, or rather something to kill everybody else for. Patriotism has generated too much pride, caused too much hatred and shed too much blood to be considered a virtue.

Patriotism also causes untold confusion in the people (and their number has increased beyond reckoning in our days) who for one reason or other, out of their own choice or against their will, go to spend their lives in a country different from the one they were born in, and then causes the same confusion in their children and descendants for years to come. The migrant, the refugee, the displaced person, the foreign worker, the student seeking degrees and employment in a richer country, the businessman settled abroad, the man or woman who marries a partner of a different nationality, and, in my case, the missionary. Two countries in one life. Two flags. Two languages. Two cultures. And in consequence a conflict of feelings, loyalties, attitudes that can create doubts, confusion, guilt, split personality, identity crisis. Who am I, again? Am I a



Spaniard or an Indian? A Pakistani or an Englishman? A Kenyan or a Canadian? Do I look at my blood or at my passport? At my birth or at my address? Do I defend my country of origin or my country of adoption? Do I profit by a situation that offers me the best of two worlds, or, on the contrary, do I get lost in the mixture, confused in the change, torn in the choice, and end up by being neither here nor there, absent from the country that would accept me, and a misfit in another which is never quite my own?

The case of Hanif Kureishi was much talked about in India last year. And, I believe, the publicity it obtained was due to its being typical of many such cases, and to his having expressed boldly what many felt without putting it in words. Born in London to a British mother and a Pakistani father he was brought up in a totally English atmosphere, was forbidden to learn Urdu which would have been his only link with Pakistan, and actually grew to be a distinguished playwright in English on his own right. Famous already, he came to Pakistan, and was greeted there as a son who has returned. Talking there with friends and relatives he said about himself one day rather unguardedly, "You know, I'm an Englishman." His statement was published in the papers and, he says, the whole country good-naturedly laughed. To them he was a Pakistani and there was nothing more to be said about it, and he himself had to recognize that he felt perfectly at home in Karachi as he only had felt in London. He posed to himself the question. What am I then? Am I a Pakistani? Am I an Englishman? And he answered with a brief answer which was true, perceptive, telling, sincere, the summary of a whole complex

situation, pointer to a particular way of perceiving himself, as many in such circumstances do without having expressed it so clearly. "I am in between." In this "being in between" there is risk, danger, anguish, hope, challenge and promise. And in any case there is tension.

A very sensitive and cultured Indian successfully settled in America told me the struggle he experienced in his soul whenever he saw his son, a splendid lad of delicate Indian features, shining eyes and gentle tan under a sporting T-shirt, a pair of jeans and a baseball cap on top of his unruly mop of hair. "When I was his age," he confided, "I knew by heart the Bhagavad Gita in Sanskrit. My father himself had taught it to me. My son knows no Sanskrit and no Bhagavad Gita. He has been born here, ignorant of the traditions of his ancestors and unable to assimilate those of his neighbours. I feel guilty of the cultural murder of my son." His words were harsh, prompted by his deep sensitivity, his sense of responsibility and his love for his son. The son will find his way and live his challenge and prove his worth. His father was only expressing the agony of being 'in between', which he felt all the more in the person of his own son. The agony is real.

Once in London I was conversing with my host, himself a Gujarati, and both of us were as a matter of course talking in Gujarati. As we were talking, his teenager son came into the room and went to tell his father something. When he heard us talking in Gujarati he stopped abruptly in the middle of the room and waited to catch his father's eye. When his father saw him, and, interrupting our conversation, looked at him, asking with his eyes what he wanted, the son forgot his errand

and told him angrily: "Why do you speak with Father in Gujarati? He knows English." Then he turned round abruptly and left the room. The son himself knew Gujarati. He had learnt the language from his Gujarati parents in his England home. He himself spoke it at home at least with his grandmother who knew no English. But he was ashamed of it 'outside'. He wanted to forget what he obviously was, to cut off in a hurry his own recent history, to dissociate himself from his unavoidable past. His father and I continued our interrupted conversation in Gujarati.

In another house during that same visit to London, when we were all going out to attend a reception, and the mother of the family came out dressed in a beautiful saree, worn with that natural elegance with which only Indian women know how to wear it, I heard her daughter complain to her in a reproachful tone: "Mummy, why do you wear a saree? You know I don't like you to wear it." The complaint jarred all the more on me at that moment, precisely because the saree is such a magnificent dress, admired by the best society in the West, sign of distinction and seal of elegance. But for a teen-age girl again, caught in the same intercultural struggle, it was a reminder of origins she wanted to forget, of links she wanted to sever. Her mother smiled and went on. She understood her daughter.

And then, more painfully, the case of a small Indian girl, again in England, who was reported by her schoolteacher to be behaving in school as though she were dumb. She never uttered a word in class or in games, before her teachers or before her classmates, not even when asked a question or spoken to. She understood English perfectly well, and wrote it correctly;

but she would not speak. Was there anything wrong with her speech organs? The parents wondered. At home she spoke normally with everybody, not only in Gujarati but also in English. She had no physical defect. Why was she speechless at school? It took much loving care from her parents and skill from a psychiatrist to find out. Her parents, eager that she should learn English fast, had taught her themselves, and in learning English from them she had picked up the Indian accent with which they spoke the language. When the first day at school she spoke before her English peers, they all laughed at her accent and ridiculed it. After that she never opened her mouth again. Shame had made her dumb. The school situation could be corrected with care and understanding. The wound on her young soul would take long to heal. A change of country brings certain advantages—and charges heavily for them.

Such is the world of the 'in between', which I have lived through in a thousand instances with Indian friends abroad, and in my own case, though inversely, as I went East against the current brain drain that goes West. For me the impact of migration was, more than political or financial, cultural, spiritual and religious. I was going from Spain to India, from a Christian to a Hindu atmosphere, from a sheltered world to an open meeting place of all mentalities and all ideologies. The initial shock was considerable. At that time the teaching of the Church, and the basis and motivation of the missionary revival of the middle of the century, was that outside the Church there is no salvation, and we were insistently taught that in practice salvation was all but impossible for non-Christians. I recited daily

with a great zeal the prayer composed and used by St. Francis Xavier himself, patron saint and model of all missionaries, in which he appeals to God to convert the heathen, since now "hell is being filled with them to your eternal dishonour." I was a child of my time, and firmly believed without doubt and without questioning that most non-Christians went to hell for all eternity. Now, it was one thing to believe that safely back in Spain at a time when everybody around was a Catholic and could obtain salvation, whatever his sins, by timely repentance, and quite another thing was to believe it in India, surrounded by Hindus and Muslims and Parsis and Sikhs whom I, while greeting with a smile and graciously engaging in conversation, had to confine mentally to hell for all eternity. My first assignment in India was Madras university for my mathematics honours, and I happened to land there on the day they were celebrating the annual sports competition. I sat spellbound through the glorious festival of strength and speed and beautiful bodies and exact discipline, unlike anything I had seen so far in my life, and I kept repeating to myself in the privacy of my mind, "What a pity that all these splendid young men and women have ultimately to go to hell for ever!" It sounds laughable now, but religious teaching did put a strain on social intercourse at the time. Vatican II, when it arrived years later, brought untold relief to my mind.

In perspective I see now that I had then great religious pride. Individually speaking I have never seen myself as a proud person. On the contrary, my recurring weakness is to underestimate myself and to put myself down. But as a representative of the best religious order (this 'minimal' Society of Jesus) in the



best religion of the world (Christianity, and Roman Catholicism at that) I felt definitely superior to everybody else. I had come to India to give, not to receive. I had nothing to learn, and much to teach. I, though unworthy, had been chosen to illumine others, to tell them how to behave, to help them generously to choose and to do what I knew was best for them. But India has a long history, has been used to such patronizing, enticing, colonizing attitudes for centuries, and in her long patience and deep wisdom knows how to deal with them gently and effectively. Soon I began to wonder, to contemplate, to open my eyes, to realize that I was in a new world full of strange riches and growing fascination, and I began to reflect, to assimilate, to learn. Yes, to learn. The greatest thing I learnt from India, and indeed the greatest thing I ever learnt in my life, was to learn how to learn, to learn that I had still to learn, to realize that after wholeheartedly going through the best and longest formation on earth, as I still believe the one prescribed in the *Ratio Studiorum* to be, I was only a beginner, a perpetual learner, a student now in the open university of oriental wisdom whose campus for me was the length and breadth of India. I began to count myself fortunate to have come to India. My real education began when I had thought my formal education was over. What I am today, and I love myself as I am, I owe as much to India that shaped me as to Spain that gave me birth. There is an expression in Indian languages to describe a life of unusual fullness, of recovery after a sickness thought mortal, of spiritual awakening: "to live two lives in one." That about covers my experience.

I'm going to attempt the impossible task of conveying with a story the sense of belonging, of being

accepted, of feeling at home in a new culture, of the spiritual mutation that lies below the surface of the geographical migration as experienced by me. A story, a true incident, a simple episode can capture the spirit of a situation better than a comprehensive description or an exhaustive analysis. I often choose that way, particularly when I want to communicate a deep experience and a rich meaning. Such is the case here.

Karsandas Manek, who died a very few years ago, was to my mind the happiest representative of modern enlightened Hinduism in Gujarat. Poet and mystic, scholar and preacher, witty and devout, he wrote religious poems, conducted revival circles, preached inspiringly, and above all was a master of the *kirtan*, the long religious discourse which can last for hours together and in which songs, exegesis, humour and exhortation combine to entertain and instruct audiences of thousands in any town or village in India. Once he came to give one such religious programme in my own city, Ahmedabad. We knew and liked each other with spontaneous friendship, and I went to meet him at the place in the open air where he would be preaching throughout the day. The informal etiquette of such meetings allowed me to arrive at any time, and I came halfway through the performance and started to make my way through the crowd. He spotted me at once from far, interrupted his speech, pointed at me so that every head on the large grounds turned to me, and said with obvious spontaneous joy: "Here comes a true *Vaishnav*!" Now, I'm not going to find it easy to explain all the sense and feeling packed in that word '*Vaishnav*' and I may even risk some misunderstanding while doing so. Verbally it means, of course, a follower

of Vishnu, the Hindu god. But culturally, socially, emotionally it means something more and something quite different. It means something like "a true Israelite in whom there is no guile," as Jesus said of Nathanael, a genuine man of deep faith and noble behaviour, a man that can be trusted, a good man. And all in the context, the spirit, the linguistic accent of a religious word sacred to every believer and loved by every Hindu. *Vaishnav*. The word by which the most famous poem of Narsinh Mehta (which was Mahatma Gandhi's favourite prayer) begins. (And the poem is precisely a description, virtue by virtue, of what a *Vaishnav*, a man of God is.) The best word in the language. The richest concept in the land. And he was applying that lovely word to me in genuine appreciation and unrehearsed outburst. He knew I was a Christian, a priest, a missionary, and he liked me and accepted me as such. And to introduce me with instant understanding and guaranteed acceptance to a devout Hindu audience he used spontaneously the supreme compliment in the religious language he knew so well and used so effectively. *Vaishnav*. I've been called many things in my life, including some pretty complimentary ones, but for sheer beauty of context and depth of meaning, for his boldness in giving me that title and my unembarrassed joy in accepting it, I hold in preference this unlikely definition the Hindu preacher gave of the Catholic priest. He made me climb the dais with all eyes still on me, embraced me warmly, and asked me to speak to his audience about Jesus. I did so. I was a true *Vaishnav*.

I want to correct now the impression I am giving that all was smooth sailing for a Spaniard in India.

There was definitely friction, though I in my naivete failed to recognize it for a long time. I was still insensitive to nationality feelings and to the unavoidable resentment against foreigners in a country that had only recently won independence. I believed that the service foreign missionaries rendered to India was so genuine and vital that it covered up whatever personal failings they might individually have. That belief was shattered the day a very fine Indian Jesuit confided in me that he was planning to leave the Society because he found unbearable the behaviour of the foreign Jesuits who were still in the majority in the place where he lived in some part of India. Their constant referring to their own country in perpetual praise of everything there, and the underlying and often explicit and disparaging comparison with India, referred to as 'this country', where according to them nothing worked. Their talking among themselves endlessly in their own language without the slightest regard to the presence of others, their own exclusive jokes, their own papers, books, magazines, their talks of things 'back home', their closed circle only reluctantly open to the outsider, their certainty to be backed by their own superiors who were all foreigners, their reliance on foreign money easily available to them, their inability to identify with anything Indian, the daily humiliation of being made to feel an inferior human being before them. And the situation had gone on for years. He spoke with such hurt that I could sense his open wound through his words. His very face crumpled in pain as he spoke. I was taken aback by that sudden revelation. He was a very sensitive man who had been broken by tactless foreign companions and superiors. An extreme case, to be sure, but to me an eye opener to a situation I had

ignored and to a pain I had not yet sensed. Once alerted to the pain, I discovered situations of friction and even head-on clashes. I discussed the matter with serious companions. Had not the hour come for us foreign missionaries to go back to our countries? One thing helped me in my personal decision, and I gladly record it here in willing testimony. Never once in all my years in India and in all my dealings with my Indian Jesuit companions was the suggestion made to me that I should leave. I certainly must have at times hurt people, and I know I have engendered hostility. But I did not feel unwanted. I stayed.

Indeed, my strongest link with India, my real attachment and my vital connexion is purely and simply the fact that my best friends are Indian. Being a celibate, that is, precisely because I am a celibate, not in spite of it, friendship plays a very important role in my life. I had in fact thought of writing a separate chapter in this book with the title "I AM MY FRIENDS' FRIEND" where I would deal with this fundamental facet of my life, and the only reason I'm not doing it is that in another book I've published very recently, "LIVING TOGETHER", I've written two chapters, "FRIENDSHIP" and "INTIMACY", on Jesuit friendship, and I don't want to repeat myself at such short distance. I feel bad about leaving a hole in this book, and worse about seeming to use the occasion to advertise here my other book, but such is the situation and I prefer to state it as it is. Apart from my Jesuit friends, however, I have some very close friends too among Hindus and Jains, and that affords me the opportunity to fill in somehow the gap here about friendship in my life, and my vital link with India through it.



In fact, I owe my very freedom to write books and dedicate time to literary activities to the best of such friends, my own head of department in the college. That story is worth telling, and it fits right here.

Professionally I am a mathematics teacher, and professional identity is going to be precisely the subject of the next chapter. Now, teaching mathematics is a very exacting job, it requires one's full energies and takes up one's full time, and with my full energy and my full time I dedicated myself to it for years in the flower of my manhood. The literary bug was however inside me, and soon I began to write in my spare time, and as my writings got published, to write more and more. Soon my spare time was not enough. Writing is also a strenuous discipline which requires time and energy, and I found myself wishing I could diminish my teaching load in mathematics. A college department is a rather rigid structure where the main concern of each member is to see to it that he is not given more work than any of his colleagues. The number of periods and tutorials, hours of supervisions at examinations, and correction of papers are jealously watched, counted, compared. I couldn't ask, couldn't expect my colleagues to take up my work and set me free for other concerns however noble they might be. And yet that is what happened. My timetable was reduced to a minimum, and examination papers were literally taken from my hands. The head of the department waived away my scruples. "You have more important work to do," he said. And I accepted the gift because I knew the genuine love behind it. Our partnership in work had gradually evolved into a deep personal friendship. One day when he had been mentioning all his friends

to me and had not included my name in the list I remonstrated teasingly: "Am I not your friend too?" And he had answered with obvious instant pleasure: "You are more than a friend to me." (What am I, that I am more than a brother to my brother, more than a friend to my friends?) His friendship proved itself most beautifully in a delicate and difficult moment. My writing work had increased beyond limits, and I in my mind had reached the conclusion that I wanted to resign from my teaching job. I knew it would not be easy. I was a senior professor in the college, mathematics is a prestige subject, and if I resigned, my Jesuit community would lose my government-paid salary and the college a good teacher. The authorities were not going to let me off that easily. For my own friend and head this would create a conflict, since he knew I was a good asset in his department and the students liked me. I mused. That year I was going to be abroad for the first term, and so we planned tentatively that I would take only half a paper, 'Group Theory', when I came back in the second term, which was the very minimum I could do if I was to remain on the staff. I came back, wishing to resign, and not wishing to put my friend to any inconvenience. I decided to put the matter to him and be guided by his reaction. We were talking on my arrival about my journey, and I was thinking of how to broach the subject of my impending classes when he guessed my desire and saved me all embarrassment by asking me in a very gentle voice as an unimportant interruption in our heart-to-heart talk: "By the way, do you feel like taking your Group Theory course?" His tone was so friendly, his phrasing so easy, his question so naturally leading to the answer I wanted to give, that I had only to say without effort, "No, Suresh." He said rapidly,

"Forget it." And we continued to talk about my journey. I knew that there would be institutional procedures and reluctant authorities and official permissions and wonderment and protests. But the deal was settled. He had supported me when I needed him, and he had done it in a most gracious way. I loved my friend for what he had done for me, and for the tactful, generous, considerate way in which he had done it. Our religions are different, but our hearts beat alike.

Since my best friends are Indian I have developed a natural affinity and spontaneous liking for people and things in India, and that affective link is what has helped me decisively to appreciate and assimilate the inexhaustible riches of the Indian tradition, and to enter myself into the wisdom of the East. When I speak and write now about India I do so from the inside, and the best compliment I have received from readers and listeners in India is when they tell me, and they have told me times without end, that I in turn have helped them to understand their own tradition better.

During my first visit to Spain I delivered a public lecture on India in the impressive San Telmo museum in San Sebastian. After the lecture, as is usually the case in such occasions, a group of people gathered round me for questions and autographs and personal greetings. In the group I spotted a young man who looked definitely Indian. I felt momentarily uneasy. Had I said anything in my lecture that could have hurt him? I had not imagined there would be any Indian in the audience, and I might have said something unguarded, inexact, objectionable. Was he there now to complain about it? He waited patiently for the group to dissolve one by one, his very patience emphasizing

his Indian character in the midst of hurried Spaniards, and when he was alone with me he said to me in perfect Spanish: "I come from India; I'm studying naval engineering in Spain; I saw today your lecture advertised in the papers, and I came out of curiosity. And I'm glad I came. Listening to you I have felt proud to be an Indian. *Gracias*." Then he turned and left. '*Gracias*', of course, is 'thank you' in Spanish.

## I AM A WRITER

I have just mentioned that retirement for me from my professional official lifelong work was no trauma. For many people it is. And the reason is not just the realization that one is old, the change in social standing or the practical issue of what to do with one's time when the daily timetable disappears, but, more deeply, the fundamental question again: Who am I now? For many years, for all the working years that constitute a man's 'productive' span of life on earth, I have been a teacher, a parish priest, a superior, or even an engineer, a lawyer, a station master. Now they have given me a farewell party, which is only a disguised rehearsal of a burial service, they have presented me with a framed certificate of my honesty, devotedness and efficiency which I wish were true and they know isn't, and they have packed me home. No more office, no files, no business meetings. I am not any more the chairman, the professor, the judge. Then who am I? An executive who had spent many years at the same table in the same office told me that after retiring he



had been invited some times by his successor in the job to visit him at the office, but that he could not bear the sight of another man sitting on the very chair that had been his own managerial nest for so many years. That chair, that table, that office had become an extended part of his personality, and to see another person in that existential frame was disturbing to him. A more sophisticated version of the balloon in the dervish story I began this book with. And I heard or read somewhere the anecdote that at a meeting of present and past officials of a large firm, an eager newcomer went about shaking hands with retired members and asking each one with the apparent idea of ingratiating himself: "And who did you use to be?" In India we would almost take that as a polite inquiry about one's previous incarnation.

I am thinking here of an exemplary Jesuit lay-brother who lived to a very advanced age performing always the same job in the same place with unflinching regularity every working day of the year except for a fifteen-day holiday and his annual retreat, and that too at a permanently fixed date every year. No sickness, no distraction, no social engagement ever disturbed his timetable or so much as delayed his arrival at his workshop. He was a model worker, and he lived up to the image he had built of himself. Even when he grew old there was no question of retiring from his own workshop. The idea never occurred to him. It did occur, though, to the people who worked under him, and through them to the superior who very gently hinted at a well deserved rest, a transfer to another place, an honourable retirement. The hint was lost on the compulsive worker. While there was work to be done and

there was strength in his body he would work, he declared. Work there was enough left, to be sure, but his strength finally began to falter. And then he panicked. The doctor ordered rest, but even he, whose prescription in sickness was to be taken as the will of God according to the rule, was disobeyed. The old worker prayed, and asked all to pray with him, for the grace that he would be allowed to work till the last day of his life. He proclaimed his confidence that his prayer had been heard, and acted up to it. He dragged himself to his workshop and stuck to his routine. He would die in his boots. There is something noble and worthy in the dogged perseverance of an old conscientious worker. Sense of duty, devotion to work, desire to give good example to the young generation, responsibility to earn his living till the last breath. People in their generosity pointed out all that in genuine praise. And they were right. But together with that, and without diminishing the real value of that attitude, there was another side to the old worker's behaviour. A darker side. His visceral reluctance to give up work, his stubbornness, his radical inability to be idle. Where did that inability come from? Ostensibly from his religious motivation to work as God's will for him, and more concretely from the need to fill his time with the only thing he knew how to do. But that alone did not explain his almost violent refusal to quit his workshop. If God's will was his motive, the superior's indication to leave the work now was as much God's will as the command to take it up had been years before. And as for filling up the day, he was so deeply devout in his old age that he could have happily spent his whole day in the chapel — apart from a game of dominoes in the evening which also formed part of his daily metabolism. His

real opposition to quitting work came from another layer of his being, and he himself, intelligent as he was and outspoken as he could be when roused, defined the real cause most sharply and vividly, though perhaps without fully realizing its implications, when he spiritedly answered someone who had dared to fool him about his non-resignation: "I am Brother So-and-so, and Brother So-and-so is the head of that workshop. Understood?" That was the heart of the matter. He was the head of the workshop, had been that for as long as anybody could remember, was known as such to all and to himself, and therefore if he ceased to be that, he would cease to be himself. He was the head of the workshop. That was his definition, his social status, his identity. If he was not that, he was nothing. In order not to cease to exist he had to cling with all his being to the only kind of existence he knew. To his workshop. The narrow concept he had of his own identity prevented him from enjoying a happy retirement.

I am not writing this just for old people to explain the crisis of retirement, but for all, young and old, to bring out the danger of over-identifying with one's profession and thereby impoverishing one's vision and enjoyment of life. This happens also to young men and women in professions which, because of public exposure, intensity or specialization, mark a person in the eyes of society and therefore in his or her own eyes. A sportsman who plays his last game, an astronaut who flies his last mission, a model who loses her figure, a singer who changes his voice. Didn't in former days boy singers castrate themselves to keep their soprano pitch at the expense of their manhood? For such 'castrati' to be singers was more important than to be male, their

profession was more important than their sex. And moral theologians of the time found subtle arguments to defend the morality of their self-mutilation. Even today the discipline of cine-stars and popular singers to keep up a perpetual youthful appearance, if not quite so radical, is not less exacting. A profession can and often does unduly mark a person and inhibit growth.

My favourite bullfighter Paco Camino withdrew from the ring when the promptness of his reflexes and the suppleness of his muscles declined and could no longer furnish the quickness and the strength essential to stand before a fighting bull in the afternoon sun. He retired, and went through the ritual of removing in the middle of the ring before an acclaiming public the pigtail, known to true aficionados as 'the added thing', which he sported on the crown of his head as the ritual symbol of his profession. He had everything at that moment, fame, money, a loving family, a place in bullfighting history. He went into business and private life, leaving only the memory of his courage bordering on temerity, the immobility of his figure before the charging bull, the narrowness of his escapes, the careless oblivion of his art, the unfailing geometry of his gestures. He was already a thing of the past, when suddenly, unexpectedly, incredibly, he announced a few years later that he was returning to the ring. What had happened? Did he need money? Was he bored? Was he suicidal? No. He had money and a job and good health and a secure future. But he was restless. He was every inch of him a bullfighter. And if he was not that, he was nothing. He was not himself. And to be himself again he was going back to the ring, unmindful of the consequences. For his comeback he chose the gala

bullfight with which the city of Toledo celebrates every year the feast of Corpus Christi. I was there. I saw him appear with a smile of fulfilment which told by itself the whole tale of his intimate satisfaction. He was himself again. He found his place to wait for the bull. He measured distances with his unfailing eye. The bull, half a ton of horned fury bred to fight, discovered its enemy and charged to kill. And there he was, his heels buried in the sand, his body erect, his hand firm, motionless till the last moment, frustrating the aim of the horns each time with a minimal waiving of his red cloth. I was so close I could hear the short breaths of the bull enraged each time by the near miss, yet eager, true to its breed, to charge again and again and again. "Caste, power and feet" are according to Ortega y Gasset, philosopher not only of life but of the bullring, the qualities of a fighting bull, and the one of that sunny afternoon in ancestral Toledo had all three in full measure. And besides, it had horns. Tall, firmly curved, rapier-pointed horns. They searched their target with singleminded intensity. And suddenly they found it. An uncovered moment, a miscalculation, a fraction of an inch, an excessive confidence of the bullfighter who in his intoxication forgot that a few years had made a dangerous difference to his own reflexes, and the thin steely horn in a sudden upward thrust entered the neck of the man and bodily lifted him with easy contempt to throw him helpless on the floor before the standing horror of a hushed crowd. Blood on the sand once more. This time not the blood of the bull but of the man who had preferred to risk his life in his profession rather than to lose it in a routine existence. The doctor's report was immediately broadcast. The wound was serious but he could recover. Days later I watched



on TV his first interview from the hospital room. The white bed, the naked chest, the spotless bandage, all in sterilized contrast to the 'costume of lights', the shining embroidery of gold and silver he wore on the ring. By his bedside stood his wife with the difficult smile she had learnt through years of being a bullfighter's wife. He answered questions. How had it happened? What did he feel at that moment? Did he regret his comeback? And then, inevitably, the question which all wanted to ask but which even a hardened TV interviewer found difficult to formulate at that moment and left hanging in the air: Would he...? He understood. He looked at his wife for her silent consent, smiled wanely but firmly, and nodded his head in clear, repeated assent. Yes. He would fight bulls again.

When one's profession is coupled with the exercise of power, its grip on the person in office can be much stronger and its mark on his personality much deeper. A cabinet minister defeated in an election after a long tenure of office, an Indian maharaja deprived of his 'purse', a manager 'for life' forced to retire. And simply a Jesuit in authority for more years than would be beneficial to people under him and chiefly to himself, who finally leaves the head of the table and joins the proletariat. To leave power is always unpleasant for the person who leaves it. What concerns me here is not the loss of power in itself but the loss of self-image in the man who has seen himself for years as a ruler of others, and suddenly comes level with the crowd. Again, who am I? When the Indian maharajas lost their thrones they still fought for their titles. It was important for them to continue to be called 'Your Highness' by all who met them, to create at least the verbal impression

that they still were those they 'used to be'. As our good Sisters say, once a mother superior, always a mother superior.

Jesuits in India remember with a mixture of awe and affection the figure of Fr. Conget, rector, superior, novice master, tertian instructor, chairman of every available conference and head of every conceivable committee in a long and important period of the history of the Jesuits in India. He was superior for almost every single day of his professed life, well into a ripe old age. Finally he stepped down and joined the ranks. Exemplary religious, he humbly refused any privilege and waived all external distinctions. But at heart he remained a superior. A whole life of authority had rendered him unable to feel, or to let others feel in his presence, that he was a 'subject' like anybody else. He never quite was that. His health, never good, required special care and attention in his old age, but he stubbornly refused any such thing as he always had done. The infirmarian appointed to look after him, who was also a Jesuit and a staunch Aragonian like himself, thought he could take advantage of the sense of the old man's religious discipline and obedience to enforce the treatment he needed, and told him something like this: "Listen father, you know better than I do the importance of obedience in our lives, and you also know that in matters of health I am now your superior and you have to obey me, seeing the will of God in what I ask you to do for your health. Now, this is the treatment you have to follow, and I expect you to follow it exactly in holy obedience." To which the old man answered with what was perhaps the most endearing retort of his life: "Now *you* listen, young man. I

have never obeyed anybody in my life, and am I going to obey *you* now?" The treatment was shelved.

It was Fr. Conget precisely, though this is only an accidental link, who decided my professional future and sent me for a mathematics degree—a command which I promptly obeyed, though I was more inclined to languages and literature. I have taught mathematics in the university with zest for years, have derived immense pleasure from working at hard problems for hours, from getting successfully at the end of an intricate theorem before an eager class, from teaching students brighter than myself, from watching the leading mathematicians of the day at work in world congresses, from following the latest research in specialized magazines, from delving into mathematical philosophy, from talking shop with mathematical friends, from writing maths textbooks and contributing to the Gujarati mathematical magazine of which my colleagues always wanted to make me editor and never succeeded. And then I have left it all without a qualm, almost without a second thought. I see now that, even at the peak of my teaching career, I never quite identified with my profession. I didn't see myself as a mathematician. I must have had a hidden resentment, though I have never consciously felt it, against the superior, just now mentioned, who sent me for mathematics in spite of my inclination, which I had already manifested then, for the liberal arts. Obedience made me study hard and pass examinations, but it did not change my tastes. I began writing almost surreptitiously, justifying to myself my literary escapism with the pastoral consideration (the word 'pastoral' was then beginning to come into use, and then as now served

to justify almost anything it could be affixed to) that since I was a priest I had to work for 'souls' and not be content with teaching algebra to students. The motive was unimpeachable. I was encouraged by superiors, and more by my own successes; my publications increased, and eventually the pen replaced the chalk in my life. For some years now in self-introduction rather than saying 'I am a teacher' I prefer to say 'I am a writer'.

Writing brings to me one of the greatest pleasures I have experienced in life: the pleasure of self-expression. The joy of playing with ideas, the chaste concupiscence of conceiving a thought, the silent intimacy of the blank paper and the well-loved pen, the daring instant of letting a thought become words, the frustration to see that even the most felicitous of phrases does no justice to the unsculptured perfection of the formless concept in the mind, the wonder to see my own soul reflected in print be it ever so dimly, the ultimate thrill to hold in mortal hands the printed marvel of a newborn book. No perfume on earth equals for a writer the pungent fragrance of printer's ink from the first copy of his latest book.

Writing is the best of professions. It has the advantage that a writer never retires.

## I AM A JESUIT

Writing is a pleasure—it is also a torture—and the most intimate pleasure in writing is the conception of a new book. This is now how I thought of this one, and in revealing that secret I reveal again my Jesuit roots. By doing so I don't feel I am limiting my scope or cutting down my readership—which is the last thing a writer wants to do. On the contrary, I definitely feel that by being myself I can reach more people; indeed, the only way I know to reach anybody at any acceptable depth as person to person is for me to be candidly and unabashedly myself. So there I go—ignoring the warning my publishers give me not to use the word 'Jesuit' too often in order not to frighten away 'other' readers. (Are we not all one?)

The heart of the Jesuit experience is Ignatius' book of the "Spiritual Exercises", and the heart of that book is its introductory page on the "Principle and Foundation". I love that page with something close to physical lust. Its direct thought, its austere grammar, its relentless logic,



its obvious yet impossible meaning, its completeness in itself that for a start seems to make superfluous the rest of the book, the tantalizing simplicity of its philosophy and the hidden warmth of its radical faith. And for me the personal memories that I've hung on it year after year in repeated meditation, and the scores of times I have expounded the revered text with irrepressible zest in retreat after retreat before eager professionals of the spirit. For sheer impact, instant effect and lasting consequences I don't know of any other page in the religious literature of the world that can match that text—and I'm a fairly well-read person in several cultures with an open mind to accept anything good from anywhere. I never forget the case, told by Rickaby, of the sailor who on a chance arrival at a retreat house was given a small sheet of paper with the "Principle and Foundation" printed on it and told to think on it for a while. Hours later he was found pacing the floor of his room up and down in a state of wild excitement, muttering to himself aloud, "Damn it, it's true; damn it, it's true!" And a Jesuit scholar, C.M. Cherian, whose writings I like to read, wrote about his first encounter as a layman with the Ignatian text: "I still have a vivid recollection of the evening when, lying in my bed, I opened the book and started reading. The Principle and Foundation made an extraordinarily profound impression on me. I felt that, for the first time in my life, I was seeing clearly the whole purpose of my life. I had been a religious-minded person, and things like the annual school retreat used to have a sensible influence over me. But the sudden insight and joyous realization that the Principle and Foundation brought me was unequalled. It was an enlightenment that has remained with me, and I wonder whether

anything substantial was added to it by any novitiate, juniorate and philosophy."

The text begins: "Man is created to praise, do reverence to and serve God our Lord, and thereby to save his soul." For me the words are so time-honoured, so fitting, so sober that I like them as they are and prefer no change, and as such I have used them for years. On the other hand I've become mindful in recent years of the fact that for some people they are not so meaningful as they are to me. A genuinely spiritual young man focussed my fears when he told me that the expression 'to save my soul' did not personally appeal to him. It ignored the body, it was concerned only with the future, it was too individualistic and almost selfish, it spoke of 'saving' when Jesus himself had rather spoken of 'losing' for his sake, and, anyhow, it did not fit into his own spiritual idiom. As it happened, he told me his reservations on the text when I was about to speak about it before people like himself, and I had no time to think of a spoken alternative that would convey for them the meaning it had for me. I knew I wanted to adapt the words to them, because the listener's need takes preference over the speaker's taste, but I didn't know how to do it and I had to face my audience in a short time. I did then what I have sometimes done in the classroom when I had to tackle a mathematical problem whose solution I didn't know. To store the question clearly in my mind, to relax, to trust myself and to launch into the exposition hoping that the right words will come to me at the right time. They did. When I came to quote the standard text I heard myself saying: "God has created me to love, praise, serve him... and so to be fully myself." I am body and soul, I

have been made by God as I am, and in being truly and fully what he meant me to be I serve him and praise him and give him glory. I cannot give glory to God unless I am I to begin with. Indeed, that is the only way I have to glorify him: to be fully me. By being myself, not a copy, not a replica, not a mummy, I bring out in me the originality of my creator who never repeats himself. And so I have to discover all the potentialities of my self, all the dimensions of my being, all the facets of my life, and develop each one in full responsibility and loving care, not to miss any part of God's revelation in me, of his art, of his power through me. This leads me to the Who am I? in all the possible senses and directions in which I can ask the question, that is, to each chapter of this book and to more conceivable ones, to know myself fully in order to be myself fully, and to be myself fully in order to glorify fully God my maker in that unique work of his art which is me. The picture completed, the statue fully sculptured, the finished symphony.

Ignatius continues: "And all the other things on the face of the earth are created for man, to help him to achieve the purpose for which he has been created." All things on earth are there to help me to be myself, to explore and to develop to the full all the possibilities that are in me. And there comes the snag. Things that are meant to be a help become a hindrance. That happens, in the last analysis, when something that should become a part of me in personal growth becomes a possession in external dependance, when a limb becomes a crutch, when instead of assimilating things and situations into myself I am lured into possessing them and they in turn end up by possessing me. Food

helps me to grow when I take it in due proportion, but if I store it and keep it and seek it and treasure it apart from myself, it becomes an obsession and an encumbrance to my growth. When I identify with external things as external I lose that much of my own personality, I am alienated from myself, I become dead. Possessions are the great threat to identity. 'I have' is the greatest enemy of 'I am'. To grab is not to be. I have, I succeed, I possess, I dominate... are pitiful yet only too common substitutes for the simple and pure I am. They are screens, masks, props. Ignatius mentions money, fame, health, long life as prime examples. Take health. As a healthy body, as part of me, as reflexion in my body of the wholeness of my soul, as loving nursing and responsible care, it is spontaneous expression of my own personality, of myself, of my true identity. That is growth and joy and fulfillment. That is me. But if health becomes an obsession, an overpowering consideration, an end in itself, an idol, a fetish, then it destroys and upsets, it inhibits work, stunts life and cripples the soul. That is not me. That is an outside 'creature' taking hold of me and subjugating me. That is loss of identity. That is slavery. "And so of all other things" (Ignatius' words).

"Hence it follows that we must make ourselves indifferent...". This is the much celebrated and much maligned 'Ignatian indifference' before riches or poverty, health or sickness, honour or dishonour, long life or short life. This indifference is, beyond detachment and openness, and certainly against any kind of stoicism or apathy, something far deeper and richer which I can now clearly express as the balance of my being, the transparency of my soul, the being myself.

being at peace, being in touch, being all that I am in conscious fullness and joyful freedom without forgetting any part of the essential me as God intended me to be, and then seeing in clarity and choosing in grace the right path at the right moment. When I am myself, everything falls into place, fits, becomes easy and ready and obvious and just. When I am truly myself, fully myself, freely myself in the total perspective of grace nature body soul vocation family society work friends faith obedience Church commandments feelings priesthood past present future life death time eternity, I almost naturally, spontaneously, inevitably acquire the wisdom to see and the strength to choose that which is "more conducive towards the end for which I have been created." By being myself, in God's loving view and tender care, I am ready at each moment to choose what I ought to choose and to be who I ought to be.

And so this book, strange as it may look to the unguarded reader, is only a commentary, in my very own way, on Ignatius' "Principle and Foundation". I am a Jesuit.



## I AM A PRIEST

I have always been fascinated by the figure of Melchizedek, though I've never quite learnt how to spell his name and have to look it up each time I want to write it. The fact that he was a pagan, a gentile, outside the fold, not a member of the chosen people, and yet was specially picked up by God rather than any Israelite leader, prophet or priest to signify in personal prophecy, in figure and image, in projection across ages the eternal priesthood of the Messiah (psalm 110), and so to typify the most sacred aspect of Jesus himself, his priesthood, his sacrifice, his Eucharist; the fact of his being king and being priest, his offering of bread and wine, essentials of life and figures of body and blood, his being introduced "without beginning and without end"; the fact of his being greater than Abraham himself because he collected taxes from him and blessed him and "he who blesses is greater than the one he blesses" (good comfort for a priest whose office it is to bless); and then his sudden disappearance without a trace from the first book of the Bible, going

from silence to silence as conscientious keeper of his mystery, taking with himself the secret of the most exalted office on earth. No wonder the author of Hebrews is taken up by him and weaves the supreme theme of Jesus' eternal priesthood round the figure of Melchizedek, while acknowledging that the matter is difficult to explain (Heb 5:11). It is not easy to speak about the priesthood, and that very difficulty bears witness to the depth of its meaning and the uniqueness of its experience. Once on the first day of an eight-day retreat for priests I put up on the notice board eight themes for the Eucharistic concelebration, one for each of the eight days, and asked for a volunteer each day to sign up and take the responsibility of presiding over the celebration and commenting on the theme. All the days were promptly filled up except one which remained empty: the one whose theme was the priesthood. When I drew this fact to their attention it became evident from their reactions that there was no question of those good priests underestimating their priesthood, but on the contrary, the very depth and intimacy of the priestly experience made it difficult for them to speak about it before others.

The letter to the Hebrews makes much of the fact that Jesus did not belong to the tribe of Levi. For us the Jewish tribes mean nothing today, but for Jews at that time they identified a man and his loyalties and his functions much as a caste in India or a tribe in Africa today. Now, argues Hebrews, if Jesus had been born in the tribe of Levi he would have been a Levitical priest, that is a member of a purely ritual, cultic, ceremonial priesthood. But Jesus belonged to the tribe of Judah, "a tribe to which Moses made no reference in speaking of

priests" (7:14), thus making it clear that his priesthood was something new and vital and different. So is ours.

Two movements, still following Hebrews, mark the new priesthood: one from God to man, and one from man to God. A sense of representation of mankind before God, and a sense of mission from God to men. The two make up the priest. When I enter the sanctuary I don't enter alone. Even in a solitary prayer, in a 'private' Mass, in a silently said breviary I am conscious that I carry mankind with me, that my shoulders are heavy and my heart is full with the cares of men. And when I appear before men, when I enter a house or face a congregation or just shake a hand or return a glance, I know all the time that I bear in me the presence of the Father, the authority of a higher court, the credentials of heaven. Priesthood does confer on a man a sense of paternity, a quality of fatherhood, the capacity to care and to love with a depth beyond his own, the privilege to make present in his person, in his word, in his concern the infinite loving care of God himself for each man. The Christian priesthood goes not only beyond Levi but even beyond Melchizedek, right into the mystery of Jesus' own heart.

A Hindu boy once helped me to understand my own priestly role, and brought home to me in his own language the reality that is mine through the sacrament of holy orders and the exercise of its functions. I had been close to him through an important crisis in his youth, and had developed and shown great affection for him which he appreciated and returned. One day he told me: "I have experienced more affection and support from you than from my own father, and I also feel like a son towards you. I only find one explanation for

that: in the previous incarnation you must have been my father and I must have been your son." I told him he must be surely right. Only I didn't want to speculate with him what must have been my status in that previous birth if I was to account for all the people with whom I have a special relationship in this one. The root of the charism lies elsewhere, but it is real and definite, and that young man had felt it and expressed it in the best way he knew. When the editor of a Gujarati digest wanted to reprint articles of mine but refused to print the word 'father' before my name, I withheld my permission. Eventually he yielded and my articles appeared in his magazine with my full name and title. I was not standing on dignity nor pushing a title. But I did want to convey to my Hindu readers something of the sense and feeling that Catholic tradition has attached to the word 'father' in a priest. It is by that name and title that I am now known in Gujarat.

The priesthood in fact can be such a transforming experience, such an enriching gift that in its very riches lies its danger. Even of an ordinary profession like teacher or lawyer I've said before that it carries with itself the danger that the person who practices it may over-identify with it and thus be eventually limited and inhibited by the very profession that first helped him to grow. The priesthood is more than a profession and therefore helps more to grow—and can for that very reason also hinder growth, prevent development, stunt personality more effectively in the end. 'I am a priest' may take such preference over every other perception of myself that it may overshadow them all and push them down. The 'father' in me may effectively swallow the man. By drawing attention to the danger of our

calling I am paying tribute to the extent of its power over us. To know it can only help us to use it better.

Once I was brought face to face with a case where I recognized on one side the elevating power of the priesthood in strength and fidelity and dedication, and on the other the blurring of the man's personality, loveability, humanity under the burden of his exalted office. He was an exemplary priest, appreciated and revered by every soul in his parish. Indefatigable in his ministry, exact in his duties, present at every sorrow, mindful of every event. Thoughtful, dependable, devoted. The father, the priest, the pastor. In fact so much so that for him the office had become a mask, his ministry was a screen, his priesthood a facade behind which his own personality lay in hiding. He met people not as persons but as parishioners, he gave advice instead of conversation, prayed for people instead of loving them. I felt a little uneasy when I saw his name in the list of those who were to attend an eight-day retreat directed by me. I knew his problem, was afraid it would come up in the course of the retreat, and felt reluctant to tackle it. It did come up and I had to face it. I thought of a way to convey to him with tact and with clarity my view of his situation, and I told him with as much gentleness as I could bring to my tone: "If anybody would ask me whether I know Father So-and-so (his name), I would answer promptly and enthusiastically, Yes, I know him, he is a model priest, an ideal pastor, I admire his zeal and his prudence, and I can recommend him wholeheartedly to you for any need or problem you may have within his jurisdiction; I know him well and I know him to be fully reliable for any kind of spiritual assistance you may need. But



then, if someone were to ask me whether I knew So-and-so (his name without the 'father' in it), I would have to answer, So-and-so? I've never met him; I just don't know who he is, I don't know the man. The fact is I don't know you. In spite of having met you a hundred times I don't know you, I don't know your tastes, your feelings, your fears, your real joys. I don't know how you feel about your parents, how you see yourself, who is your best friend, who really matter to you. I only know you outwardly. Your very correct and very superficial appearances. Official condolences, predictable blessings, repeated liturgies. All that is very beautiful, but it is not you. And I for one would prefer a single glimpse of you to even the most worthy programme of pastoral work. I only see your hand inevitably raised to bless, your lips for ever uttering words of wisdom, your face dull and your eyes turned to heaven. I know only the priest in you. I wish I could know the man." I knew I was rather carried away by my desire to be clear and to be effective, and my words were perhaps exaggerated and even harsh. Yet they were not clear enough. Or maybe too clear. He remained stunned for some time, plainly unable to get over the acute embarrassment that meeting for once a person face to face without a protective mask had caused in him. But he soon recovered. He stiffened up, tightened his face, set his voice to a droning monotone, and drew on his best theology to explain to me how the priesthood was to take preference over everything else, and he would be a good priest, even if he was nothing else, as that was the only goal of his life, whatever sacrifices it might entail. I listened in silence. He taught me well. After a brief attempt to meet him as a person I had become again for him a mere parishioner. If I had knelt down at the end he would have given me a blessing.

The priesthood does bring a measure of loneliness to a man even in the best of cases. Though, going deeper, loneliness is not the exclusive patrimony of priests. Every human being is fundamentally himself and therefore fundamentally alone, and no wife and children however affectionate, can remove the essential burden of loneliness every man has to carry to his tomb. In the priest, however, his loneliness is sealed and proclaimed by his vow of chastity, his resolve to live alone, his solitude of heart. A living parable, like Jeremiah's sterility (Jer 16:2) or Ezekiel's bereavement (Ezek 24:16), of the dealings of God with his people, and in our case of the essential human condition of being alone before God.

Jesus was the most lonely man on earth. His nights alone, his walking by himself ahead of the group of his disciples on the road, his apparent detachment from his mother, the awe he inspired in Greek visitors who had to appeal to Philip and he to Andrew to win admission into his presence, his being different, transcendent, unique, his being the Son of Man in a sense in which no son of man is, his having to say in studied differentiation "my Father and your Father, my God and your God" (Jn 20:17) instead of simply "our Father and our God", his strangeness that kept people in suspense (10:24), his brightness that put Peter out of his mind on mount Tabor, his reticence before the Sanhedrin, his silence that mystified Pilate and frightened Herod. The man who carries his cross for him is a stranger forced to do the job, and the disciples chosen to wake with him sleep. Jesus was alone because he was unique, his essential solitude being witness and figure of his radical transcendence. And then, deeply and mysteriously,

Jesus feels himself abandoned by the Father in his last trial, and literally hangs between heaven and earth, poignant image of man's ultimate solitude on earth.

I enjoy company and can bear solitude; I treasure intimacy and know the strength it can confer and the joy it can bring to a man's heart. And I know too those periods, those hours, those instants of darkness when loneliness strikes and the heart in its unaccountable moods sheds all kinship, forgoes all ties, disowns every friendship and stands alone, frightened and helpless in the shadow of its own misery. The lonely child. The frozen night. The silent universe. Every man is an island.

I am standing in the waiting hall of a large modern airport. I have already passed all controls, have necessarily taken leave of those who could and cared to be with me till the last legal moment. And I have not yet boarded the plane where announcements and adjustments and meals and a film are going to distract me from myself till I fall asleep in sheer organic self-defence. I am still standing in the hall. Dazed, bewildered, alienated. My hand luggage is at my feet, my boarding card in my breast pocket, and my passport, my ticket, my money all distributed through the insides of my clothing, with my mind scattered all over them in a pitiful effort to keep track of all of them simultaneously. I am alone. My heart is just a clock. My mouth is dry and bitter. My eyes see a hundred faces and not a single person. My skin feels taut and tense, aggressive frontier to a hostile world. My legs are wooden stumps locked into position. My hands hand idle, oblivious that they ever had a function to perform. I have no face. I have no past, I have no

future. I am nobody because nobody knows me. If my boarding pass is taken from me I'll die here, unable to go ahead and unable to go back, anonymous martyr in a glass catacomb. I don't know how many ages have passed since I entered the hall and how many more will pass. I am alone, ignored, unbefriended. I drink bitterly the anguish of my loneliness. I have spent some of the dreariest hours of my life in the waiting halls of airports.

Fatherhood and loneliness. Sacrifice and fulfilment. To belong to every family without belonging to any. To receive every confidence while asking for none. To forgive sins with a hand that itself has sinned. To be 'merciful' and 'compassionate', while 'faithful' and 'undefiled', which are all epithets from Hebrews. And that with the firmness, the assurance, the very oath which God brings to bear on the most sacred of matters as promise of grace and seal of perseverance: "The Lord has sworn and will not take back his word: You are a priest for ever in the succession of Melchizedek." Thank you, Lord.





## I AM MY BROTHER'S KEEPER

At the end of the introductory chapter I just hinted at the connexion between my self-integration and my relationship with others, and I said there that the better I know myself, the greater the value of my life for others. The more I am I, the better I can be of service to others. That is an important point I want to enlarge upon now. In fact I cannot know myself properly without reference to others, I cannot be fully myself unless I am truly for others. With Jesus, who has been defined in our days as 'the man for others', I have to discover in me the dimension of commitment, dedication, service if I am to be what I am meant to be. My neighbour (and my neighbourhood is now the whole world) is inextricably part of me.

I choose again an Ignatian formula. The words with which he defined the aim of his Society: "Not only the salvation and perfection of our own souls with the divine grace, but also the decided commitment to the salvation and perfection of others with the same

grace." I have already explained in a previous chapter that 'salvation and perfection of the soul', means for me 'fullness now' that, under the same divine grace, will flower in its day into 'fullness for ever'. The interesting point now is that, as commentarists note on this passage, Ignatius uses here the word 'aim' in singular, not in the plural. In his mind the 'salvation and perfection of my soul', and 'the salvation and perfection of others' are not two separate aims, however much connected and dependent on each other, but one and a single aim. This means, in turn, that I cannot obtain my own 'salvation and perfection' unless I decidedly work at the salvation and perfection of others. That is, in my logic, that I cannot be fully me unless I am decidedly and committedly for others. With the opposite statement just as true: I cannot work properly for others unless I am truly myself. And all this was already there in Ignatius' old prose, which we have forgotten to the extent that 'personal growth' and 'service for others' often appear in our discussions and planning as two opposite aims. Not for a Jesuit. Not for me.

My growth helps others. Others help me grow. I would have never put myself into the exacting programme of training and work that has claimed my blood and absorbed my life if I were not convinced that ultimately I was doing it to help others. God has said: "Whatever you do to any of these little ones you do it to me." That value is basic in my life. Impelled by it I studied and learned and taught and wrote and preached and counselled and visited homes and did all that I knew and even some things I didn't know how to do. The thing I least know how to do in life is to organize an external activity, draw up a course of action, collect

people, get money, keep accounts, write reports and achieve tangible results (or at least make the world believe I've achieved them). Almost everybody else around me seems to be very good at that, but I am just unfit for action. Yet even that I most earnestly tried in my honest desire to help others. I take a special pleasure in giving myself credit for things nobody gives me credit for, and one of them is that many years ago I founded single-handed the Social Service League of St. Xavier's College for the service of the poor in the city. Every Sunday afternoon I would take my cycle, collect a group of students, go to a slum with them and play there with the children, talk with the young, enter the huts, sit with the elders, and do nothing very concrete except promising that we would surely come again next Sunday. I only succeeded in running the League sufficiently long to make its disappearance embarrassing for the college authorities, so that when I had to leave its leadership out of sheer incompetence, someone else took it up and went on to do a splendid job with a permanent organization that was then imitated by other colleges in the city. They even call me now to give talks in their camps and preside over their functions, and they explain to me painstakingly the aim and the need and the fruits of their social service organizations. I listen. I express admiration as though all this were news to me. I nod my approval. They have my full blessing.

Later I did something which I did not know very well how to do either, but which turned out to be an interesting piece of work and a radical experience in my life. I went to live with poor Hindu families in the city, begging hospitality from door to door, staying for a few days and nights in whatever house I was admitted free of

charge, sharing with the family in the house their life in everything as one of them, and coming to the college on my cycle only to teach my classes daily as usual. For ten years I lived that way. Small one-room houses where children and grown-ups share the common available space during the day, and spread mats on the floor to sleep at night, the men in the only living room while the women do the same in the kitchen. There I worked, prayed, prepared my classes, wrote my books while I watched and witnessed and drank in and suffered and enjoyed the daily life and cares and joys and the children's noise and the parents' quarrels and the financial straits and the religious faith of simple people in the poorer quarters of the city. I did not preach. I just listened and understood and identified with them. And then gradually, insensibly, without set purpose but with spontaneous urge and personal concern, their problems began to appear in my weekly articles in the press. Every Sunday for many years now I write a column in the two main daily Gujarati papers of Ahmedabad and Bombay, and that column has done its bit to create awareness, response, social conscience and public concern for the main issues of the common man. That brings me reactions, visits, mail, appeals for help in all troubles known to man, tears, confidences, joy, gratitude and occasional abuse. I have been abused anonymously several times for drawing attention in my column to the plight of the poor. Now, I just hate anonymous letters; they are mean, cowardly and frustrating as they bear no address and I cannot hit back unless I publish the letter in my next column giving the attacker the publicity he precisely desires. I never do that. I prefer to record here the bemused complaint of a dear colleague who told me rather

despondently one day: "Listen. Unless you stop writing in the papers, there will never be peace in my home again." I asked with real worry and surprise: "Why? How can that be?" He explained meekly: "Every Sunday when the paper comes in the early morning, my wife grabs it first, looks for your article, reads it, and then brings it right in front of my nose and tells me triumphantly: 'Read it! Father has written it directly for you! It all applies to you word by word. Now you know what is wrong with you and what you have to change. Do it!' And my Sunday is ruined before it starts. If you say you write to make families happy, couldn't you stop writing to make *my* family happy?" I suggested that he could cancel his subscription to the paper. But then I went and did something better. For my article in the same paper the next Sunday I took the theme of wives who use my articles to attack their husbands..., and I eagerly waited for my colleague's reaction on Monday. A smile told me everything. She had hidden the paper..., and he had found it. Peace had returned to the home.

My aim in my work is to help people free themselves from the bondage of prejudice, complexes, fears, compulsion, addiction, superstition, routine, friction, expectation, inferiority, competition, loneliness, misunderstanding, despondency, despair. The burden of unfreedom that fetters the mind and cripples life itself. I carry before my mind the gospel scene where a woman who had been a cripple for eighteen years, who walked all bent double and was unable to stand upright, was healed by Jesus, and walked straight again while people rejoiced and critics murmured. The relief of standing erect. The joy to be able to look up. The



dignity of the body. The slavery of eighteen years. The healing touch. The sign of hope. The figure of liberation. All that flashes in my mind when I see a young man smile after a crisis, a woman's tears dry up slowly, a couple reconciled, a prejudice dissolved, a fear overcome, an injustice exposed, the light of hope kindled again in a tired heart. The woman of the gospel standing straight. That is redemption.

I deal in ideas. That is some consolation and some limitation. The consolation is to know that ideas have power, that a book may start a trend and a speech may launch a movement, that an inconsequential article may reach a corner of the earth and touch a heart and redeem a life, that the ultimate bondage is the mind's and therefore the ultimate liberation is through thought, that ideas have wings and concepts strike root, that the printed word stays and the press rules the world. The limitation is to realize that ideas are only ideas, and what the world needs today is action. The needs of mankind are so great and so urgent that to take time out to think and to write seems almost an unwarranted luxury. The scene today is for the men of action. The need is genuine and the will is generous. The field belongs to them.

In that very thought, however, I find comfort for myself. I am not alone. I have brothers who are working in the very frontiers of action, manning the trenches and fighting the battles. There are Jesuits far and near who have taken up in full heroic practice the greatest causes on earth, the cause of poverty and injustice and oppression, and are opening a new age by throwing in their lot with those who have nothing, and working with them for freedom and equality and dignity and justice. They

give voice to those who have none, unite those who are scattered, organize those that are divided, and remind the world of the existence of suffering and hunger caused by the greed of men in the midst of selfish affluence. Those champions of the poor suffer hardships and face dangers in their lives. And such men are my brothers and their concerns are mine. I want to make their work my own by telling them from these pages my admiration, my gratitude and my brotherly pride at their dedication, their generosity and their identification with those whose need is greatest at a moment when mankind needs a new conscience and a new heart. I feel their work as mine, just as I want to believe they take my work as theirs, and we all work together, each one in the way he knows best, to bring happiness to the hearts of men.

I knew well an old Jesuit who lived a rather humdrum existence for many years, and had not accomplished very much himself in his life; but he had an unusual capacity to rejoice sincerely at the success of his brothers. He was not specially gifted in any way, and he knew it, but then he could take as done by himself any good work or any outstanding achievement of any Jesuit. He rejoiced with a child's simplicity at any good news, any report, any celebration of other people's triumphs. I used to tell him that God was going to give him a very big reward, because in the final account he was going to take as done by him all the good works done by others which he had appropriated to himself by rejoicing at them. His lovely charism had one little limitation, though. For him to rejoice at the work of another, that had to be the work of a Jesuit; if it was the work of a diocesan priest... it wouldn't quite

do! That was a shadow he never got rid of entirely, though I good-humouredly used to tease him about it. Even charisms are limited by our idiosyncrasies. But in spite of that limitation, which I regret, there was something very beautiful in that old man's capacity to fill his life with the achievements of others. In that spirit I want to look at my work. To treasure what I do, and to make mine, in appreciation and joy, what others are doing around me.

That way others help me grow. Now, briefly, the other direction: My growth helps others. If I put this statement in the negative, it becomes even more evident: My lack of growth will definitely harm others. If I am immature, insecure, insatiable, unaware of my needs and insensitive to my own feelings, I am going to do a lot of harm all around me by imposing my needs on others, working out my complexes on them, creating mutual dependence, using people and manipulating them in whatever field I am and through whatever means I have at hand, and all that unawares to myself. I heard a mature Jesuit say: "If I'd known myself thirty years ago as I know myself now, I'd have saved much suffering to myself... and to others." And positively: I can render no better service to my neighbour than to grow fully into the best that I can be, to be free, sensitive, balanced, serene and affectionate, seasoned and spontaneous, sincere and delicate, firm and gentle, secure and humble. Then I will be helpful wherever I am. My own 'salvation' will help my neighbour's 'salvation'. Thus service to others has the double beneficial movement that by helping others I help myself, and by helping myself I help others. The man who refuses to be his brother's keeper, refuses to be himself. Selfishness is suicide.

*I AM MY BROTHER'S KEEPER*

Service of others is a human value, a Christian value, a Jesuit value. By weaving it into my life, I want to be a better Jesuit, a better Christian and a better man.





## I AM MY BODY

How can I forget you, my dear body, when I am speaking about myself and you are part of me, inseparable, intimate, tangible part of me? Without you I don't have a face, without you I have no birth, without you I am not I. Indeed I feel bad to speak of 'you' and 'me', of 'soul' and 'body' as though they were two different, opposite, antagonistic parts of me. Cursed be the Greeks who taught us that language! I reject the grammar that says "he *is* a good soul" and then "he *has* a fine body", making the person only a soul that happens to own a body as it could own a piece of furniture or a fur coat. And that faulty grammar is only linguistic expression of an innate prejudice against you, my body, as something separate, accidental, disposable (and of course, biodegradable), and even worse as the seat of all evil, of passions, of concupiscence, as the 'flesh' that is sinful while the 'spirit' is holy. They made you, my body, into the villain of the piece, they did not recognize your innocence, your balance, your vision, they ignored the wisdom of your

instincts and the evidence of your senses, they called you a danger, a threat, an enemy, they insulted you and sought to cripple you.

They taught me to mistrust you, to keep a watch on you, to keep you in check, to subjugate you. Do you remember, my dear body, how I used to flog you with medieval gusto, knotted whip on naked skin, four times a week, Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, plus eves of feastdays, before going to bed in rhythmical ritual of penitential atonement? And how I dragged myself along in the mornings of those same sanctified days with the penance chain tightly wound and firmly secured round the living flesh of my left thigh, its thin iron spikes biting sharply into my sinews at each limping step? I never asked you how you felt then, I didn't consult you, I didn't take you into confidence. I just did what I was told to do, what everybody else was doing, what I was sure was the right and proper thing to do. To subdue the body. To tame the beast. To conquer the enemy. It didn't occur to me then that you were my first and obvious friend.

Mind you, I'm not judging my past, I'm not even condemning bodily austerities, much less condemning myself for having practiced them liberally. I just want to go with you now through that period of my relationship with you to bring to light the fact that I was doing all that to you apart from you, that I was not in touch with you, had not learnt to feel you, to listen to you, to dialogue with you, that we were then strangers though so close together, and I took decisions about you, made you starve or wake or smart with pain without ever giving a thought to your own feeling or to your true welfare in the matter. I had not yet learnt to be a partner with you.

Even more damaging to my relationship with you than the concerted effort to put you down was the attitude that was created in me and continued for many years of just ignoring you. Never mind the body. Go ahead with spiritual conquests and intellectual work, and never mind what happens to the body. Prayer and studies are what matter. The body doesn't count. Go ahead, and it'll have to follow. I literally left you aside. I got up early, knelt motionless for hours in prayer, sat in hard chairs for most of the day, gulped down my meals with almost contempt for food and regret that I had to take it at all, and hurried back to my books in a relentless quest for knowledge and perfection. And I never stopped to consider what happened to you, what were your legitimate needs, how you would grow healthy and strong, how you would be happy. You just didn't exist for me—though all the time you were me.

The oculist who out of his desire to serve the Church treated me and all my Jesuit companions without charging fees at the time, found a correlation in us between poor nutrition and loss of eyesight, and wanted to publish our statistics in a book he was writing on his speciality. Our superiors, horrified at the aspersion such a disclosure would cast on them, stopped him from publishing our case, but the fact was there. Wholesome abundant food was not easy to come by in post-war Spain, and our growing organisms felt the lack of it. There were also frequent power cuts in those days, and we were given each a small sperm candle of uncertain light by which to read in the dark hours. Deciphering Greek texts by the flickering glimmer of a candle in a corner, oval patch of yellowish light on hieroglyphic page, was murder to the eyes.

Some of my companions, more pious or more lazy than I was, chose to go to the chapel and pray when the lights went off. I read on. I would burn my eyes but I would master Greek. To know Greek was more important than to have healthy eyes. I have worn spectacles ever since. Do you see how I neglected you, my dear body, and you were always the last consideration in my decisions, or rather no consideration at all?

And then sex. The one and only sin. And you identified with it. The sin of the flesh. The burden of the body. Shame, guilt, scruples, fear. Almost the regret of having a body, of being sexual beings, of not being angels whom we were exhorted to imitate. Angelical purity. Affective sterility. The less thought of the body in our lives the better. How could I befriend you when you were the enemy within, the hidden spy, the agent of Satan? That is what I was taught, and that is how I was trained. Now that I have come to know you so well and love you so much it even seems strange to me that for a time, a very long time, I may have been ashamed of you, that I should have blushed at the onrush of sex and should have been afraid of my manhood. You understand me, don't you? Maybe it was the very intimacy of our relationship, the being so close to each other, so thrown into each other that made us shy of each other and uneasy in each other's company. I see now that intimacy with you, as with anyone, had to be won, closeness had to be deserved and identity had to be achieved painfully together. It has been a long road. Thank you for your patience.

It took many years for me to wake up to the reality that I was body and soul, to begin to notice you, to trust you, to pay attention to you, to give importance

to you. But then I moved fast. If I took the blame let me take the credit too. I soon learned to appreciate you, to cherish you, to love you. I welcomed with a joyful heart the new dimension you brought to my existence. To discover you, to reown you, to reinstate you in my life brought to me a feeling of wholeness, a touch of reality, a measure of earthly sense and bodily wisdom that enriched my thought, mellowed my temper and enhanced my pleasures. I now feel at home with you, I am proud of you, I feel happy to have a body, to enjoy with you the blessings of life, to treat you well, to deserve your confidence, to relax with you. I feel happy when I can give you a good meal, which is not easy so long as ascetical superiors and lazy cooks conspire to get for me a higher place in heaven than I ever aspire to. I check with you now always to know what you truly want, to understand your needs, to heed your warnings, and I never act now without you or against you. Even to take up a new work, to accept an invitation to talk or to travel, to choose between two courses of action, I unfailingly consult you. You know your strength and you know your preferences, you know what is good for you, and I have come to accept that what is truly and genuinely good for you is good for the whole of me because you and I are one. And then you have your own silent but efficacious, pointed, unerring way to signal your choices in the radar of my cells. My growth in sensitivity to understand your messages is for me a happy measure of my own maturity as a person. I owe that to you, my body.

You know well that one of my greatest pleasures is to walk. Long, daily, solitary walks. And the pleasure comes from the fact that in walking, you and I are so



close together. Legs and feet and lungs and heart, the whole of you in concerted action, in bodily rhythm, in joyful step, and I sensing every muscle, every breath, the pulse of my veins and the presence of the breeze against my face. No discourse, no worry, almost no thought while I walk. Only you and I and the road and the trees and the sky and the birds and people who pass and cars that speed by. I see it all, take it all in, let the whole of nature enter the whole of me through my open senses, feel one with all that is and breathes and exists through you, my body, who by your very materiality are in existential communion with the whole of creation; and I come back strengthened, refreshed, unified within me and with the universe, each walk an open-air sacrament in a cosmic dispensation of grace.

In one thing I've been consistent. Throughout my life I've considered the moment of going to bed at night the happiest moment of the day. And that is no laziness, no defeatism, no boredom, no withdrawal, no quarrel with life, on the contrary, it is the joy of being alone with my body, the touch of laundered linen all around me, the freedom to be horizontal, the presence before me of each of my limbs together, the snuggling up in fetal reminiscence, the twilight images of thought, the slow merging of the soul into the body, the making over of the throne of reason to the democracy of the senses for the night, the dimmed consciousness, the confident plunge into oblivion. I take some time to fall asleep each night, and I beatifically enjoy every minute of it. Preparation for sleep is the purest of innocent pleasures.

People say that sleep is an image of death. I am not afraid of death. Death for me will be painful to be

sure, because it will be separation from you, my body, and from all the people I love, and that will give me pain, but it does not inspire in me fear. I dislike to have to end this life which is treating me well, but I'm not afraid of leaving it and going ahead. What I do have is a Pauline reluctance (and students of the New Testament know what I mean) to be without my body, to become a naked soul (2 Cor 5:3), a disembodied spirit, and that reluctance comes, as it did with Paul who thought in Hebrew terms, from taking you, my body, seriously, from seeing you as an essential part of me, from understanding myself as body-soul, almost as a animated body rather than as an embodied soul. Life without you, my body, makes at present no sense to me, and the resurrection of the dead is a happy assurance that we are meant to be forever one. I welcome that hope. I wait for that day. Meanwhile I want to remain close to you, dialogue with you, embrace you, go through life happily with you. And when you get tired, let me know. We'll lay ourselves down to rest together.



## I AM MY THOUGHTS

Thinking is my vice. I can be alone with my thoughts for hours on end, can live on my brain's activity for days together without hardly noticing the existence of fellow human beings around me, and I guess I could go on without food for quite some time if I had enough new books to read and enough blank paper to write on. To open and begin to read a new book is for me sheer concupiscence, and some times I've thought I could sell my soul to the devil for a new idea. When something clicks in my mind, when the hidden link between two ideas is suddenly revealed to me, when a new concept makes sense in a flash, when an old familiar thought unexpectedly shines with an entirely new light, I experience a tremor of pleasure that runs through my soul and my body like the thrill of creation or the breaking of dawn. The Greeks likened inspiration to the sting of the gadfly. It maddens when it strikes. And the madness is pure delight.

In fact this very chapter is an example how thought works in me, sometimes upsetting me violently

with irresistible fury. I had not planned to write this chapter for a start. From the chapter on my body I had passed directly to the chapter on my feelings, had written it, and had gone on to complete the rest of the book without a hitch. There was no chapter in it on my thoughts. I had neglected them purposely when writing about the different aspects of my self, as I deliberately wanted to play down this side of my character. I reckoned that my ideas appeared sufficiently in each page of the book without any need to write a special chapter on them, and so I did accordingly, skipped the theme and thought I could get away with it. I had underestimated the power of my thoughts to strike back. They did so in an almost brutal way. How could I have written about my feelings and not about them? They would not let me go. They planned their strategy, bided their time, and struck at night. It was an uncanny experience. I had already submitted the typescript of the book (without this chapter) to the censors and the publisher, had put it out of my mind, and had gone to sleep at night without a care on my conscience. I was sleeping happily when I strangely woke up with a thought sharply outlined in my mind like a message from outer space: "You must write a chapter on your thoughts to go before the chapter on your feelings in your book." I dismissed the thought. The book is fine as it is, there is no need to add any chapter, I've already submitted the typescript, and if there is anything I dislike in life it is to be disturbed in my sleep. Forget it. I turned around, curled up under the blankets (it was a cold night in the winter of Mount Abu in Rajasthan), and called back my sleep. I could just as well have called the moon. Sleep would not come. Instead, the intruding thought struck insistently, repeatedly,



rhythmically with ruthless authority. "You *must* write that chapter." I resisted with all my being. I will not yield to pressure. This is irrational, stupid and intolerable. I decide what I write and what I don't, and I don't want that chapter. Back to sleep. The thought now tried more cunning tactics. As an insider it knew my weakness and struck home. It began to present to me in the dark of night all the clear outline, the headings, the main points, the connecting links, the flowing argument, even some of the very expressions that would make up the chapter in all its logic, appeal, completeness. The whole picture stood irresistible before my reluctant mind. I could not bear that. I remained in bed a long time, but I knew that was only a tame device to save face and keep my self-respect. The battle was lost. After three long hours of desperate fighting, with my bedsheets crumpled under me like a discarded kleenex, with every limb in my body aching, and my eyes hurting from the effort to keep them shut, at the impossible hour of 2'30 in the morning, I rose from bed miserably, switched on the light, blinked, pulled out a blank paper and jotted down the detailed sketch of this chapter as it had imprinted itself on my mind. I had signed my capitulation. A peace treaty. I went back to bed and slept instantly without uncrumpling the bedsheets. For all the struggle, the fight, the defeat, the sleeplessness and the utter fatigue, the final feeling was one of unmixed happiness. Ideas are masters of pleasure.

The second paragraph of the next chapter, if read in this light, will appear to be repetitious of the ideas of this chapter. It *is*, because in fact I wrote it before this one. And I am letting the repetition stand as a printed

witness to the way in which this chapter was born, and as a reminder to myself of the tyranny of my own thoughts. The mind is the greatest despot on earth.

My mental background is pure Aristotle. Somewhere at the back of my head there must be a label "Made in Greece". First principles, categories, syllogism. Cause and effect. 'Prime matter' and 'substantial form'. A consistent account of the universe, a perfect picture, a comprehensive view. Nothing satisfies the mind more than a systematic presentation that takes in every detail, accounts for every fact, makes sense of every situation and explains the whole with reference to each of its parts, and each of the parts with reference to the whole. That Aristotelian concept of the universe, filtered through Christian faith in the 'Summa' of St. Thomas Aquinas, is the most satisfying mental construction I know, and when I studied it with generous commitment of heart and mind through happy and dedicated years in my early youth, it gave me a sense of security, of intellectual pride, of being in command of the situation without any doubt or fear and with an absolute finality for ever, that has marked my thinking and steered my life. I still think in syllogisms, distinguish between 'substance' and 'accidents', and believe that no effect can happen without a cause. All that is pure Aristotle. It would be a dire awakening in later life to discover that not all mankind thought that way.

The corner stone in the Aristotelian edifice is the principle of contradiction. Being is not non-being. Simple enough. And deep enough to found a whole way of thinking and a whole style of life. Clear-cut logic, mutual exclusion of opposites, being and

non-being, black and white, good and evil, heaven and hell. The Western mind. My own mind. I did notice already then that in the effort to fit the universe into a neat mental pattern, points had at times to be stretched, corners to be rounded off, details to be sacrificed. Not everything in creation was black or white, nor even being or non-being. Some kind or other of '*entitaculae*' or 'lesser beings' which were neither quite one nor quite the other kept intruding stubbornly like Martian cockroaches into a spatial lab. They were disregarded, persecuted, ignored, insulted, outlawed, despised. But they were there. I even wrote an essay, now lost to the world, on those notorious *entitaculae*, those half-breeds between being and non-being, that haunted scholastic thought through centuries without relief. There were cracks in the system. But only cracks. The system stood.

When mathematics came into my life, it strengthened even more my mental outlook, my deductive bent, my certainties. Mathematics also was made in Greece. And mathematical certainty was the model and envy of all certainties. As true as two and two make four. My intellectual satisfaction increased. A glowing moment in my life arrived for me when in my study of the works of George Boole I came across the passage where he proves the principle of contradiction in three simple mathematical steps from his fundamental equation. And I need just now a desperate act of will-power and a firm determination not to violate these pages with mathematical symbols, to refrain from quoting that proof here. To see that most sacred of principles in spotless mathematical garb was heavenly reassurance. My intellectual optimism reached its climax there. And

then, unavoidably, it began to climb down. Unexpectedly, it was mathematics itself that began to teach me its own limitations. And if mathematics itself had flaws, who could be saved? First, personal limitations. One day, while conducting a summer course for university professors, I declared I would give a prize to anyone who could produce an example of a function with a rather peculiar behaviour. Next day one of the professors came to the board and explained his example. His colleagues clapped. It had been a brilliant exposition. He claimed the prize. Yet, while listening to him I had all along an uneasy feeling that warned me something was amiss. I couldn't pinpoint what was wrong, but there were red flashes all over me. Suddenly I had it. I came to the front and refuted the example. Some saw my point at once. Others resisted for a while. Eventually my view prevailed. There was no prize. But, together with the satisfaction of having detected the flaw on the spot against everybody else, I was left with an unpleasant feeling and an unhappy experience of the vulnerability of mathematics. If these people, most of them better qualified and more intelligent than I, could be misled in judging mathematical evidence, where was certainty? And if there was no certainty in mathematics, where else could it be? Later I heard a responsible mathematician declare in an international congress: "Mathematics has become so complex that it is safe to say that today all important theorems are false, and all true theorems are trivial." Some food for thought. All that we could obtain now from mathematics was 'statistical certainty'. Something like getting a Gallup poll on Pythagoras' theorem. Gone was the crown of the queen of sciences. But then, apart from the personal limitations of men of mathematics,



it was the system itself that faltered. The very 'foundations of mathematics', a theme in which I specialized for a time, aligned against each other irreconcilable schools of thought that fought bitterly like political parties in a heated campaign. The foundations were definitely shaky. Goedel's now classic theorem states that if a mathematical system is consistent, it cannot be complete, and if it is complete it cannot be consistent. That is the most remarkable piece of intellectual humility man has ever produced. The honesty of the gesture did restore credibility to mathematics... at the cost of proving its own inadequacy. The *entitaculae* of the scholastics were back in place. And then I heard Paul Cohen, after obtaining the Field medal (the mathematics equivalent of the Nobel prize) for proving that the continuum hypothesis could be 'neither proved nor disproved' (and quite a tour de force that was!) declare confidently that soon mathematicians would accept that the said hypothesis was 'obviously false'. By then I was pretty well confused about my certainties, and ready for new views and new ideas. Just in time.

Hinduism was by then getting into my lungs. I breathed it with my daily life. Readings, friends, festivals, ceremonies, the bells of temples and the perfumed spiral of the incense stick. I went to the roots. I wanted to know. I am not the superficial kind that is satisfied with a 'Do it Yourself' manual, and I am impatient with the tourist brand of Hinduism for easy export which ignores the depth and the beauty and the philosophical weight and the far-reaching consequences of Indian thought at its best. I studied and studied. Vedas and Upanishads and the sixteen Puranas and the six Darshanas. And the Ramayana



and the Mahabharata. And in it, the Bhagavad Gita. I took it up reverently, and I pondered it verse by verse. Till I came to that one where Shri Krishna says in self-definition: "I am being and non-being." That was great! That was the exact opposite of all that I had been taught till then. My cherished principle of contradiction down the drain. With the *entitaculae* restored to full respectability, like the villain in the play suddenly knighted by the queen. And Shri Krishna was saying it definitely, unequivocally, cheerfully, mischievously, with that twinkle in his eye that enthralled the milkmaids of Vrindavan, and with that firmness in his tone that readied Arjun for the battlefied. It was a new world. An entirely new outlook on reality. I explored it with cautious wonder. Alice through the Looking Glass. It was like looking at the world with a new pair of spectacles, like tasting new food, like treading on new ground. And the ground stood. Things made sense. Life was possible. The universe still held together. I was learning that there are different ways of looking at the essence of things, and each one has its own validity. Ecumenism at the roots. Dialogue in depth. Pluralism at the first-principles level. My thinking machine would never be the same again.

In those day I witnessed the plight of a Westerner who was teaching Aristotelian logic to Indian students in the university. He was a born dialectician. His classes were a feast of wit, sharpness, repartee, verbal glamour and deductive skill. He delighted his students with his mental prowess. What he could never do was to convince them. He would complain to me in utter despair: "Today I proved to them beyond any doubt

that they all were wrong on this point, and nobody could answer my arguments. Yet they all laughed at the end. What can you do with such people?" His arguments were flawless. His logic was perfect. Only he never realized, or he never wanted to accept the fact that their logic was different. His logic was not their logic. He proved his conclusions only to himself. His students ran on divergent tracks. They were learning the subject to pass an examination. But their minds functioned differently. A syllogism would not dent their armour. Their mental climate was the Gita. Shri Krishna had just smiled on in them. "I am being and non-being." Convince me if you dare. Or rather, if you are ready to let go of your idle mental fencing, come and see for a while with my eyes and think through my brain. You may see things in a new light, and the world in new colours. And in any case it'll be fun. Then you can go back to your own thinking and enrich it with the experience. You can only gain by it. If you dare.

I dared. And my own experience was enriched. I have often spoken and written on what India has given me. Friends, warmth, outlook, depth, perspective, understanding, peace, patience, mysticism, universalism. I can write pages on that. Or, instead, I can just mention, for him who will understand, the one simple, intimate secret India has joyfully whispered in my ear: that one can live (and be happy) without the principle of contradiction. Lovely gift.

And still one more step. Again unexpected and unplanned by me. The best things in life are those that happen, not those that are contrived by the mind and manufactured by hand. And something happened again. The encounter with a deeper current that also

sprang up in India, and then went North and farther East, and now is all over the world in different garbs. Buddhist thought. Or, rather, the absence of thought. The stilling of the mind, the taming of the intellect, the silence of the spheres. The koan, the riddle, the Zen story, the laughing monk. The rebirth of the senses, the wisdom of the body, the intimacy with nature. A whole new world of obvious reality and spontaneous action. Of open eyes and ready hands. The present moment and the immediate contact. With thinking relegated to the background, lest the clatter of the brain interfere with the business of living. I still go on thinking, as the momentum imparted to my mind through almost a lifetime is too much to stop the wheels suddenly, but thinking, which was for me a way of life, is now a mere pastime. The tall bambu is tall, and the short bambu is short. That is the new metaphysics. And again it makes sense. Or no sense at all. It doesn't matter. The urgency of thought has disappeared, and, when it actually takes place, thinking becomes all the more pleasurable because it is no longer serious. I enjoy it because I don't need it. If Hinduism had taught me that one could live (and be happy) without the principle of contradiction, Buddhism has taught me that one can live (and be happy) without thinking. The ultimate liberation. The final enlightenment. The supreme gift. For me to accept in my own way, to integrate in my distinct whole, to weave into my own pattern. I cannot complain of lack of colour in my life. I am collecting rainbows.

At the end of this book, which, as I've said, I have already written and submitted, I've given a brief gentle glimpse of what Zen means now for me by telling a Zen

story which sums up the whole book — and me with it. Have the self-control to wait for it and read it in its context. It'll repay your patience.

Such is then the story of my thoughts. Made in Greece, remade in India, and unmade by Zen. Three traditions in one life. For myself to see my own mental evolution so clearly was well worth a sleepless night.





## I AM MY FEELINGS

A Hindu friend of mine, public figure in Gujarat and sensitive poet, who is extremely perceptive and has known me for years, told me once directly: "You have brains no doubt, and that is what people may first see in you; but your heart is definitely bigger than your head." I felt intensely happy to hear those words, and I could only smile bashfully my grateful satisfaction. Of course I had known that myself all along, but to hear those words straight and clear from a friend whose judgement I appreciate and whose insight into persons I admire, gave me a deep instant pleasure which registered at once all over my face. He had said something important for me, and I would not forget it. He had said that my heart was bigger than my head. And I like it that way.

Not that I despise ideas. I love them. I live on them. I am an intellectual. I enjoy reading, thinking, talking, arguing, proving, refuting, dreaming, contemplating. Ideas are my food, my addiction. But then

I realize that my ideas are not mine. Every single one of them is borrowed. Even to say that my ideas are borrowed is a borrowed idea. Everything I say has been said before. Every thought is plagiarism. Every statement violates copyright. Even when I assimilate an idea and make it mine and call it my own, it is shared by a thousand other people all around me so that it hardly defines me. I cannot say I know a person if I only know his ideas. To make this point positively, my feelings are much more me than my thoughts are. My feeling is mine in a sense in which no idea is. My feelings engage body and soul, are filtered through every layer of my being, quicken my pulse and warm my face. When I feel I am much more I than when I merely think. I can define my political affiliation by repeating the principles of a party's manifesto, but I cannot define myself as a person by listing my ideas whatever they may be. To know myself it is indispensable that I know my feelings, and that comes from the fundamental fact that I *am* my feelings.

I heard a priest companion say: "I have no feelings. Don't speak to me about feelings because they mean nothing to me." Only a few hours earlier I had seen him speaking with a young man whom he very much liked, and showing him such obvious signs of restrained affection that struck anybody who happened to see them. He did have feelings but he refused to accept them, to own them, to see them. He was uncomfortable with them, felt awkward, embarrassed, guilty. And he took cover in a stout denial to the world and to himself that he had any feelings. He was the loser. I heard another priest say: "I understand that my calling requires of me the giving up of every personal affection,

friendship, intimacy, love. I know that is a handicap in life, but I have freely accepted it for a higher goal in my vow of chastity and want to live that way." That was how he understood his celibacy. Origen castrated himself. That was how he understood the gospel.

Feelings are what makes a person come alive. I cannot understand myself and be myself unless I take my feelings into consideration. I have realized that I am almost two different persons to two different kinds of people. The people who know only the intellectual side of me: my mathematics students, my university colleagues, my occasional acquaintances; and the friends who know the whole of me, who know me as I am, feelings and all — feelings first. And I react in quite different ways to these two different types of contacts. With my friends I am relaxed, witty, tender, irreverent, I play mischief and talk nonsense, I fool anybody and talk lightly of the heaviest things on earth. With the rest of men I feel stiff, formal, can freeze anybody, can ignore any questions, can sit through a whole meeting with a straight face and not a word to cross my lips. Sometimes I get scared at my own aloofness. Who am I? That stone image in a corner of the room? I shudder to think that. I don't recognize myself in it. That is surely not me. I am me only when I am alive, and I am alive in so far as I have feelings. The blessed role of friends in my life is to bring out my feelings, to make me come alive, to make me be me.

Even bad feelings are good. Only my close friends have had the privilege to see me angry, annoyed, bored, distraught, furious, miserable. Only with them I let myself go in reckless oblivion, and show sides of me which the world is ignorant of, and which are all the

more me as they are more intimate and more withdrawn. In seeing myself with them as I am I bring to life repressed parts of me, forgotten corners, anaesthetized limbs. And all that is me. My shadows are as much part of me as my lights, and without them there is no picture. Negative feelings are not to be ignored. They all contribute to the total me. And the total is what matters.

I have learnt that by asking people the straight question "Why did you do that?" I never get the right answer. Not that they are trying to lie or to dissemble, but simply that the question is wrongly directed and therefore brings back the wrong answer. The 'why' goes to the head, and the head is not the source of the person's behaviour. Human actions do not originate in the intellect but in the whole organism and particularly in the feeling system which creates reactions and prompts responses. When the head is asked it gives its own version which is always incomplete, faulty, misleading. The official answer, the minister's file, the final communiqué. Reasons which are no reasons, and explanations which explain nothing. The proper authorities have been asked and the proper answer has been given. The proper answer is no answer. The 'why' reveals nothing. If I want to know myself I have to go beyond apparent motives and external patterns, and get down to the secret chambers where the complex alchemy of my behaviour is brewed in silence and mystery.

I had to intervene in a case where a religious superior had severely punished a subject who had incurred a slight sex offence. The punishment seemed to be out of proportion with the offence, and I was asked to find out whether it was really so. The superior was a

straightforward man, and I asked him directly, "Why have you punished him that way?" He answered: "It was my duty. As a superior I have to see to it that the rules are kept, and when they are not kept, to redress the wrong by the proper punishment. And then, chiefly, I had to do it for the man's own good. If he is checked in time he may still mend his ways and not get into trouble again." Perfect answer. Too perfect. The file, the book, the manual. Question: Why? Answer: Because. A defaulter is punished because the sanctity of the law has to be upheld and because of his own good. Stupid of me to ask. Why did you do it? Because I had to. I instantly knew I didn't have the true story. But then I also knew I had given the wrong lead. I had asked 'why'. And I had got back reasons. All wrong. I had to start all over again. I did. I got round to the man's feelings. He was angry for a start. With whom? He was unhappy. Because rules had been violated? He resented the offender. So much holy zeal? It actually turned out that he was jealous of his subject. He himself, the superior, had a serious problem tackling his own sex drive, was manfully fighting his own battle with much difficulty and great generosity, and so when he saw a man in his own house and under his own command indulging in what he himself was so heroically striving to stay away from, he felt doubly excited in his own sex, annoyed that someone under his nose was enjoying the forbidden fruit and getting away with it, challenged in his authority, frustrated in his purity. And he struck back. The punishment was vengeance. Concern was jealousy. Righteousness was spite. The rule had certainly to be protected and the subject to be helped. But an angry superior was not the person to do that. And the direct question 'Why did you?' was not



the way to get at the root of the matter. The 'why' never gives the real 'why'. If I want to know myself and the motives of my actions and the root of my behaviour I have to learn to dig out my feelings, to sort them out, to identify them, to respect them, to accept them, to cherish them. My feelings are me.

I began the chapter with the weighty testimony of one who is a public figure and a wise friend. I want to end with a much more important testimony. That of my five-year old niece. She is a most charming and affectionate child, and to her I owe some of the truly happiest moments in my life. With her I am myself in a way in which perhaps I am not with anyone else. I play, I fool, I clown, I laugh, I forget all cares and enjoy all things in her blessed innocent marvelling loving company. I like to greet her, first thing in the morning when she comes out of her room with sleepy eyes, small steps, a long flowery night gown down to her feet, her arms pointing to me asking to be lifted, easy tender sleepy burden round my willing neck. And I love to see her, last thing in the day, when she climbs at night into bed with her toys and her dolls, tucks herself up with clumsy movements in the huge bedsheets and closes her eyes in sleep. I am by the side of her bed in the dimly lit room. I kneel and bend, my face level with hers. She senses me and opens her eyes. I draw close. I kiss her. She kisses me. Then she says very gently, half in sleep: "You are very loving, uncle." She takes out her little arm and puts it snugly round my neck. She falls asleep. I very slowly, lovingly, reluctantly take her arm and put it back under the sheets. I remain a long time looking at her. She has said something important for me. She has told me that I am very loving. She knows.

## I AM MY ACTIONS

The importance of knowing who I am is that I will act the way I perceive myself to be. My identity determines my behaviour. I mentioned the point in the introductory chapter and I want to elaborate it here. The scholastics had a pithy saying: *agere sequitur esse*. What I am determines what I do. That is the point. The Who am I? is the basis of the What do I do? Every being acts according to its nature. Every man behaves according to his own self-image. He will strive to be in effect what he sees himself to be in his mind. Acting follows being. Thus by knowing myself, by knowing my self-image I get to know the secret of my actions, and by choosing and changing the traits of my self-portrait I can direct the course of my doings. I give some examples to make clear this basic point.

This is a situation I have handled with almost boring monotony in a hundred cases. I mean many more. A young man marries and brings his wife to live with him in his parents' home as is usually the case in India.

That is, he continues to live in his own house where he has always lived, where he has been a child and a boy, and where he now acquires a new status, a new dimension in his life, a new family of which he now begins to be head. And there comes the trouble. Two families under one roof. He belongs to both. In one he is, and continues to be, obedient child of his parents. In the other he is head, husband, and soon father himself to his own children. Who is he, then? Is he his father's son or his son's father? And, more practically because more daily and urgently and unavoidably perplexing, who is he now, his mother's son or his wife's husband? Two women in his life. Two claims on his priorities. Two sides to his character. Who is he? Of course he is both things. But which first? In his own estimation of himself, in his understanding of his life and his definition of his personality is he first his mother's son or his wife's husband? In every single case I have handled, and I repeat they have been countless, the young husband in a joint family in India continues to see himself first and foremost as his parents' child, his mother's son, and only secondarily, subsidiarily, subordinatedly as his wife's husband. As he continues to live in his house and with his family, his old identity continues, his old affiliation stands. Those walls have seen him grow under his parents' obedience, and he continues in his relationship to his parents as he continues in his relationship to those walls. The frame is the same, and the person inside the frame remains the same. His mother's son. Only a little modification has taken place, a little touch has been added. He has a wife now. A silent, obedient, self-effacing figure in the house. Her husband will certainly love her, care for her, try to please her, but he will not side with her in

conflict with his mother. In the unavoidable friction between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law he will unquestioningly take his mother's side, defend her before his wife and impose his mother's conditions on his wife. He will act as the person he is. He is his mother's son and therefore will take his mother's side. Action follows conviction. Identity dictates operation. The way he sees himself is the way he will commit himself. And his wife will find refuge in patience.

The change of attitude, when and if at all it comes, is traumatic. For a husband to begin to take his wife's side before his mother and in her own house requires a change in his personality, in his identity, in his way of seeing himself, which cannot be reached without much pain and courage. It means to begin to see himself as his wife's husband, and that under his mother's eyes, to change his self-perception, his very being. To change his way of acting at home means changing the way he understands himself. That is not easy.

For the woman it is not easy either. When she marries and leaves her home and goes to live in her husband's house and with her husband's family she also feels the pull of the double situation, the anguish of the transition. She is helped in her change by tradition, by acceptance of her new role, by the fact that she now lives in a new house, and the changed surroundings help the inner change. She more readily identifies with her husband's wishes and serves her husband's needs. And all the while she retains her intimate affiliation as member of her own family and daughter of her own parents. She never forgets her first home. Later when she has her first child she will go to her mother's house

for her delivery, stay there long, renew her vital link with her family, come back strengthened and reassured of her place in her own home while enhanced and confirmed in her new role by the presence of a child in her arms, supreme gift to her husband, proof of her fertility, credentials for a place of honour among her new family, consecration of her womanhood and assertion of her right to respect and independence as a person and a mother now with her own child. I am not advocating here the joint family system. It has its dark sides as well as its bright ones, and I have just pointed out the danger for the husband and his diminished opportunity to grow while under his parents' shadow. What I definitely want here is to pay tribute to those magnificent women who achieve in their lives the synthesis of two personalities, and provide a silent beautiful example of how much change can help a person to grow, and motherhood can elevate a woman.

Another family situation which depends on the same principle. There are cases when a widow dies shortly after her husband's death, though she may not have been ill at the time. Sorrow and solitude take their toll and can shorten a life. This can be a beautiful tribute to love—and can be a pitiful mistake in self-understanding. The wife had so identified with her husband that she had no existence apart from him. So when he died, she too lost her being. Over-identification brought extinction. She had lived so much for her husband and planned her day, her life, her very existence so much solely for him, that once he was gone there was no meaning in her life. She was not an independent person, she was just her husband's wife, and when he died she was nobody. And she expressed that



last fact of her non-existence by dying. For a wife to die shortly after her husband is not a matter of love but of having lost her own personality long before.

The burning of widows in old India was just a grim expression of this same wrong belief, the ultimate example of the evils of over-identification. The wife was taken to be so much part of the husband that when he died she too was burnt on his funeral pyre. For all its injustice and brutality the custom had its own elementary logic. If the wife was just identified with the husband she could not very well outlive him. The wife had no existence apart from her husband, she was a non-person, and therefore when the husband died the wife had to die too; and if she did not oblige by doing so through love, she would be helped to realize her non-existence by being escorted up the steps of her husband's funeral pyre. The remedy of the evil did not lie in restraining the executioners but in changing the concept. The wife is not part of the husband. She has her own independent existence in her husband's lifetime, and therefore after it too. She has a right to live because she has a right to be herself. Love unites, and in that lies its strength, but love does not confuse two beings into one. That is over-dependence. A funeral pyre for two.

There are many Muslims in India, who are good Indians and good Muslims. Again, which first? Does an Indian Muslim see himself first as an Indian or as a Muslim? In a conflict between India and Pakistan does he at heart side with Pakistan which is a Muslim country or with India which is his native country? Once when the Pakistani cricket team defeated the Indian team in India, some Indian Muslims cheered. And

there was trouble. Here the Who am I? defines which side I am on. Identity determines loyalty. National integration can only be rooted in personal integration. Who am I? is the most practical question in the world.

In 1931 Japan conquered Manchuria from China and established there the state of Manchukuo. In 1945 the Soviets invaded Manchukuo and the Japanese fled. Many of them left their children with Chinese families for their safety, hoping to retrieve them later. They never came back. Recently almost after forty years a search was instituted by the government of Japan, and some of those children, now middle-aged, were reunited with their now elderly parents. The meetings were not easy, and one can imagine the emotional confusion of those 'children' who had now two sets of parents: natural parents and foster parents. Whose child am I? Whom am I to call mother? The woman who gave me birth or the woman who brought me up? Where am I to stay? Which country is my country? Some even needed an interpreter to speak with their real parents as they did not know Japanese. Bewildered identity for a torn person. The problem of the adopted child. When and how to tell him that his parents are not his parents? If my parents are not my parents then I am not I. Where do I belong? The problem of the child whose parents divorce and remarry. What does he call his new mummy?

In a powerful novel on 'rootlessness' the Gujarati writer Bhagavatikumar Sharma presents three cases of troubled identity. The heroine, Kshama, learns painfully that her father may not be her father. "Then who am I? An illegitimate child? The fruit of adultery? The result on an illicit union? A flower without a name? A

bastard? A dirty bitch in the street? That question, Who am I? is what shakes my soul." Then a doctor, Krunal, born in a large aboriginal household where ancestral custom permitted a certain laxity of morals, confides to Kshama: "My birth has always been a subject of favourite gossip for those around. My father... was he really impotent? My grandfather ruled the household... and why does he show me such special love always? Or maybe that dark servant we had... am I his wife's son? And did she really go to that contractor who came to work for us? Why did my father leave the house? Why did my mother take poison? Questions, questions. I am only questions and doubts." Finally Nihar, more poignantly, reveals to Kshama that he was found on the first step of the main temple in the pilgrimage centre of Dwarka when he was three months old. His Who am I? fills three throbbing pages in the novel.

Rootlessness is the disease of modern man. What are my roots? Where do I come from? Who am I? No answers. No direction. No clarity. No strength. Without roots the tree cannot grow, cannot be firm, cannot be itself. Cannot meet the wind and reach the sky. It is when I know myself well, when I know who I am and what I want, that I can reach out and meet others and assert myself and find my place in the world. Rootedness gives confidence. Rootedness, paradoxically, gives mobility. The novel quoted just now bears the title *Urdhvamul*, which means 'root-in-the-sky', bold upanishadic metaphor to denote man's real position in the universe from which his strength derives. My roots are in heaven.

One final case. A young man, son of a successful industrialist has been offered by his father studies

abroad, special training, a place in his industrial empire and eventually his own central office to inherit. Could anything more be desired? The young man refuses the offer, goes to live by himself, finds some work to support himself and a scholarship to pay his fees, chooses some studies of his own liking, applies for a job far away from his father's influence, struggles alone and lives his life. What has happened here? Was he not secure with his father? Yes, but he was not himself. And to be himself he found it necessary to be by himself. He did not accept his father's values. He could not identify with his figure. If he lived under his father's shadow he would only be that, his shadow. No personality, no independence, no identity. To assert himself he had to detach himself. He had had the strength to perceive himself in himself, and the determination to carry out in action what he knew himself to be in thought. The way I see myself eventually determines the way I act to be myself. That is why I want to know myself as completely and deeply as I can in order to be myself as courageously and freely as I can be. Knowledge is power. Knowledge of myself is power to be myself.

I am my actions, because what I am is what definitely and observably appears in my actions. The more I am myself in multiple awareness and conscious freedom, the happier will be the range of my behaviour and the deeper the reach of my expression. What I am, truly and radically determines what I do.

## I AM I

There are many types of sarees. I know, and can identify with reasonable accuracy, the Banarsi, Bengali, Kancheevaram, Hyderabad, Batik, Bandhani, Panetar; though my women friends tease me and challenge me to name a new saree from their inexhaustible collections, and they enjoy it so much when I make a blunder that I cannot resist the mischief of occasionally giving a wrong answer on purpose. I also know that the queen of sarees is the Patola. And there I make no mistakes. For one thing the Patola is unmistakable, it stands alone in its unearthly perfection and rare craftsmanship, and for another, its serene beauty, its nobility, its ancestry, its value beyond value make it unthinkable to fool with it and treat it lightly.

A single Patola saree takes all the members of the three generations in a specialized family four months of hard dedicated exclusive labour to complete. And there are few such families left, some in Patan and some in Rajkot. (The Hyderabad Patola is only a light



imitation whose value lies in being just a faint reminder of the original product.) Its price is commensurate with the labour and skill it entails, and no shop or bazaar sells it, but each has to be individually ordered through personal contact.

What makes the Patola so unique? The incredible fact that each thread is dyed separately and individually in all its colours prior to its being woven into the fabric. This sounds unbelievable, but I have seen it with my own eyes. The pattern is designed in advance. Each Patola has always four essential motifs repeated through its length and breadth: an elephant, a parrot, a dancing girl and a flower, though the identifying details vary with each individual saree. Then the live colours are applied to the thread in predestined spots so that when it is fitted into position in the huge slanted loom, the pattern continues and the design is formed. The result is the Gujarati saying: A Patola may tear, but will never lose its colour. A Patola is for life.

That is the essence of the Patola, and that is what fascinates me. The value of each thread. The contribution of each detail. The emerging of a pattern through the individuality of each colour. And there I see an image, beautiful and striking, of all that I have wanted to say in this book. The personality comes from each of its traits, the Patola from each of its threads, the 'who am I?' from each of my individual avatars woven together in full respect to each one and full consciousness of the whole. In the Patola if a single thread is lost, the design is blurred. In my life if a single dimension is lost, my light is dimmed. Hence the care, the detail, the commitment to give each thread its full value, its full length, its full colour in each determined spot to bring out together the

splendour of a unique art. I take my threads one by one: the priest in me, the teacher in me, the writer, the man, the body, the feelings, my mother's son, my friends' friend..., each chapter in this book and others, known and unknown to me, which I could have written, each single thread identified, recognized, stored, prepared, accepted, embroidered; every part of me renowned and vivified and nursed and animated by my single spirit. Each part of me present to me. And out of them all the unique pattern that is me. The human person. The priceless Patola. The final identity. The elephant and the parrot and the flower and the dancing girl. For ever different. Indisputably unique. Never to be confused. Never to fade. A Patola is for life.

A wedding reception in India is, among many other beautiful things, a gorgeous parade of innumerable sarees in all colours and fashions and types and styles. I stand in the middle, drab male uniform in a feast of butterfly wings. I watch, I notice, I appreciate. By my side a girl who has taught me many sarees and wears them herself with infinite elegance and supreme taste, is helping me to identify types. Suddenly she lowers her voice and says close to my ear in a hushed reverent tone: "Look; that is a Patola." She does not need to point. I see it. I instantly recognize it. We admire it together in silence. I want my life to be a Patola with each single thread alive and each colour burnt unforgettably into its unique home. Different and striking. New and joyful. No cheap printing, no standard pattern, no mass production, no servile imitation. I want to be a Patola. I want to be I.

The wonder is that when the pattern emerges it is always beautiful. That is true of every person. The I is

always a work of art. What is important is that the I now recognizes it and accepts it. My life is worthwhile, I am valuable, the sun is shining high. If only I have eyes to see it.

Herbert von Karajan, man of strong artistic preferences, was asked in one of his rare interviews, who in his own most valuable opinion was the best living pianist. He answered without hesitation: "The greatest living pianist is Maurizio Pollini..., and he doesn't know it." That is the burden of most lives. I am great, and I don't know it. My life is wonderful and I alone am not aware of it. I don't recognize my worth. I don't see my beauty. I don't appreciate my Patola. The very shy reluctance with which people usually react to direct declarations of their worth is indication of the general difficulty we all have in appreciating ourselves. And the loss is ours. I want to bring out here this most important point for our personal happiness by retelling an incident that touched me deeply.

I have known for quite some years a girl who through an occasional yet truly satisfying relationship of mutual respect and affection has inscribed some innocently happy hours in my memory. She lived in Bombay where I rarely go except for public engagements, but when I did go, I used to seek her out in between talks and garlands and receptions and autograph seekers, and go to eat *chana-batura* anonymously with her in any busy corner of the mad city. She had all qualities a woman may desire, beauty, elegance, taste, intelligence, reserve, dignity, a first-ever record in studies and a bright professional future ahead. Yet in some unaccountable way she was always self-deprecating, put herself down, dressed all too simply,

just effaced herself. It was only years later, when she was already happily married and engaged in a work of service and dedication that brought out the best in her, that I learnt her story. She told me one day without introduction: "I have disliked myself all my life. When I was small my mother told me I was black... and you know what that means for an Indian girl. I hated myself. All my obvious qualities and successes were not enough to reconcile me to myself. I only enjoyed putting myself down in self-misery. Then I came to know you through mutual friends. At first I gave no importance to you. You were a great man, and how could you pay any attention to me? It was only politeness, I thought. But then I saw that you came again and called me and went out of your way to be with me. Could there be something in me? I could no longer hide from myself the fact that you truly and personally appreciated me and loved me. And that opened my eyes. I was at long last reconciled with myself. I saw my qualities, which were there all the time, but which now had become evident when you reflected them back to me. Now I love myself, I enjoy life, I have a wonderful husband and a job that fills my heart. I am happy. And you started all this, because you discovered myself to me. I just wanted you to know it. And God bless you for it, Carlos." When I recovered from my emotion and found speech, I said: "That is about the most beautiful thing anybody has ever told me in my whole life. That you love yourself because I have loved you. My love has made you love yourself, has made you be yourself. You have always been beautiful, and today you look more beautiful than ever." And I just pronounced her name.

There is still one more thought before I finish. The

mystery of the I. Again an echo of my first chapter. I don't want to sound triumphalistic at the end and give the impression that I have solved the mystery. The mystery stands. That unique mixture which is me is enriched each day. I never reach the bottom of the self. "Water can never find out what water is." (Krishna-murti) But precisely because it is water it will continue to flow and to sing and to wash the land and to seek the sea.

My final attitude is to contemplate the mystery, to live reality, to let life be, to enjoy each wonder, to treasure each happenning, to be myself, to be. I'm going to finish the book as I began it, with a story, but I want first to make clear the importance the story has for me, its radical depth and liberating message. I'm not putting here a story just as a nice way to end the book. By no means. I could have finished the book with the previous incident of that lovely girl, and a beautiful ending it would be. But I want this Zen story here because it embodies the utmost practical wisdom and the ultimate simplicity in dealing with life, and as such it has helped me greatly. I could indeed have just given that story from the start and saved myself the trouble of writing this book. But, for one thing, I wanted to write the book, and, for another, if I printed the story by itself nobody would read it, much less read into it. A lot of noise has to go by before if we are to appreciate silence, and a lot of nonsense has to be swallowed if we are to taste wisdom. My book is the nonsense, happy lighthearted nonsense that it is, and the wisdom is the story that follows in all its deceiving simplicity.

A Chinese peasant called Chung-Fu, or whatever a Chinese name is supposed to sound like, led a simple

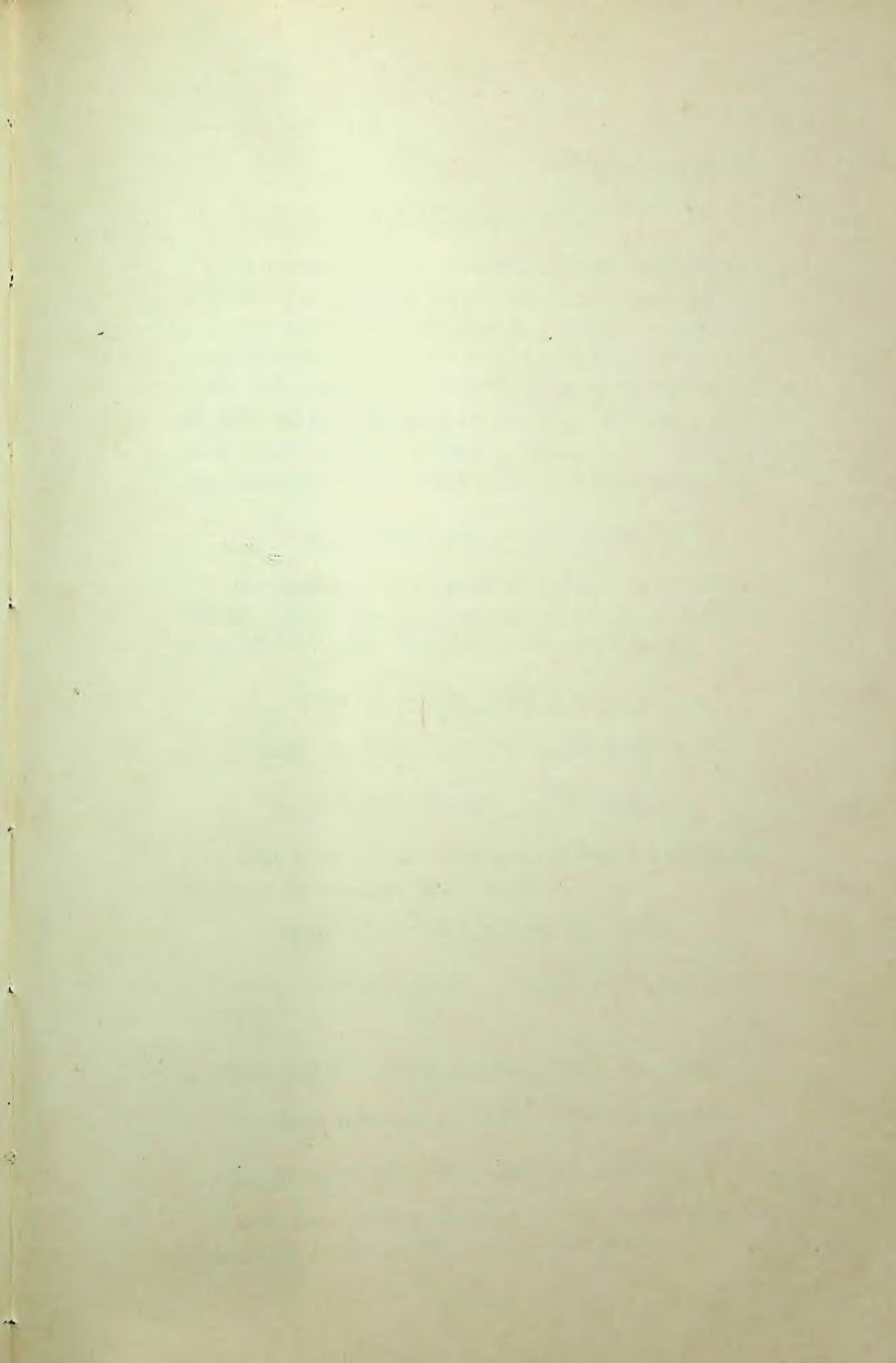


life selling fish in the market place. As he advanced in life, age, however, he felt the need of spiritual enlightenment, and he decided to approach a master whom he knew well, as he had been from his own village, and only now had retired to a cave where he practiced meditation and enlightened inquirers. He went to him, renewed his acquaintance and asked for advice in the search he wanted to undertake of his true self and his new life. "Help me to find out who am I," he asked, "and what am I supposed to do." The sage, who knew him well and knew his life, looked at him intently and uttered the words of guidance: "You are Chung-Fu, and you are supposed to sell fish at the market place."

I am Carlos Valles, and I'm supposed to be writing books.

It's a lot of fun.







## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The INDIAN EXPRESS of February 6, 1980, carried on its front page the following news: "The wellknown writer Carlos G. Valles has been chosen by the Gujarat Literary Academy for the 'RANJITRAM GOLD MEDAL', the highest Gujarati literary award. The decision was unanimous." That was the first time in history when that prestigious award went to a foreign writer whose mother tongue was not Gujarati. Before, he had received the "AUROBINDO GOLD MEDAL" in 1968 and the "KUMAR SILVER MEDAL" in 1966. Indeed his very first book was chosen as "BOOK OF THE YEAR" by the Gujarat Writers Association when it appeared in 1960, and has been reprinted fourteen times since then. He has published by now more than forty books, and a survey conducted by the Lions Club shows him as the most popular essayist in Gujarat today. Together with his teaching and writing he has kept through the years a steady ministry of directing retreats for Jesuits, particularly the thirty-day retreat for Tertians, and has also been teaching in the regional theologate of Gujarat Province.

For a space of ten years he lived with poor Hindu families in the city, begging hospitality from house to house, sharing fully their life like one of them, identifying with them in all their ways. This way of life together with his widely read writings have won for him acceptance into Hindu society as the best known and loved representative of Christianity among them. His Hindu friends insist that, according to their belief in reincarnation, he must have been an Indian in his previous birth, and that explains why he feels so much at home with them and they with him !

His present birth, at any rate, was in Spain in 1925. He joined the Jesuits there in Loyola in 1941, and was sent to India in 1949 to start a new university college in the city of Ahmedabad, where he has since resided. There he continues to carry out his ministry of teaching, counselling and writing.